

**RLST 2400:
RELIGION AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY
SPRING 2017 – T/TH 11-12:15
HLMS 141**

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What role does religion play in contemporary society? What do religious traditions have to say about contemporary ethical, social, and political issues, and how have these traditions themselves been transformed in light of changing circumstances? What place does religion have in a multicultural society, and how should religious and secular voices interact in discussions about ethics and public policy? This course will explore such questions, focusing on the contemporary United States. We will examine a wide range of voices drawn from Christianity, Judaism, and other traditions, considering diverse roles played by religion in ongoing debates about issues such as same-sex marriage, climate change, war, genetic research, criminal justice, torture, sexual ethics, abortion, and economic justice. We will devote special attention to the relationship between religious and secular perspectives, as well as to ways in which communities reimagine, debate, and struggle with the meaning of ancient sources and rituals in the modern world.

Our sessions will involve lectures as well as class-wide and small-group discussions.

Course Materials

The following book is available for purchase at the CU Bookstore and will be available on reserve at Norlin Library: *The HarperCollins Study Bible* (HaperCollins 2006).

All other readings will be available through Desire2Learn (D2L). Go to “Readings” (in “Content”) and select the appropriate date.

Course Requirements

1. Attendance and Participation – 15% of final grade

Lectures and discussions are central components of this course, and will frequently cover material that is not included in the readings. Punctual attendance is mandatory: you are allowed to miss two classes with no questions asked, but further absences may require documentation from a doctor or other appropriate source. Make sure to sign the attendance sheet each day in class. Active and responsible participation in small-group and class-wide conversations is also required: you are expected to listen open-mindedly to your colleagues and contribute meaningfully to our conversations, expressing your own views while being open to having those claims challenged with charity and humility. We will discuss the format of these conversations—which will involve what the Jewish tradition has termed *hevruta* learning, or learning with a study partner—during the first

week of the semester. Each of us has a responsibility to help create a space in which we can discuss sensitive matters on which we might hold very different positions—a space in which we can comfortably and confidently articulate our own commitments, while at the same time taking seriously (and being intellectually vulnerable to) views we might find objectionable.

2. Quizzes and Short Responses – 40% of final grade

We'll be covering a broad range of material, and it's crucial that you keep up with the readings. Therefore, you will be required to complete brief online quizzes and submit short response papers.

Quizzes (20% of final grade): Each week, you will be able to use D2L to access a five-question quiz on the readings assigned for our Tuesday session. The quiz will be active from the Friday of the previous week through 10 am on the Tuesday of the due date. (On weeks 13 and 14, the quiz will be active until Thursday at 10 am because of religious holidays: see the “Time in the Classroom” section below, as well as the course outline.) You may refer back to the readings as you complete each quiz; however, be sure to complete the readings before accessing the quiz, since you will have only 10 minutes to finish the quiz once you've started. The first quiz—on the readings for January 24—will be active on January 20. We will count only your ten highest quiz scores when calculating your grade.

Short Response Papers (20% of final grade): In addition to these quizzes, you will be required to submit four short (1-2-page) response papers on the readings. These responses are opportunities for you to formulate and test out your thoughts on course material—to offer interpretations, raise questions, draw connections, and develop critiques. Responses must be submitted through D2L by 10 am on the due date indicated in the course outline. One week before each due date, I'll post several guiding questions to help you formulate your response: you will be asked to address one of these prompts. (If you'd like to reflect on a different topic, send me an email, and we'll decide together whether the proposed topic is appropriate.) These responses are graded out of 10. You will receive a 0 if you do not complete the assignment by the due date or if you fail to show that you have done the reading; a 6.5 if you demonstrate that you have done the reading but do not understand the material, or if you do not fulfill the requirements; an 8.5 if you mostly offer an accurate summary of what's in the readings; and a 10 if you both offer an accurate summary and share some original insights. Unless you contact me in advance to discuss some special circumstances (such as illness), no late responses will be accepted.

3. Midterm – 20% of final grade

You will have a take-home midterm essay exam, which will ask you to synthesize material from the lectures and readings for Weeks 1-7. This exam will be available online before class on March 2, and must be submitted through D2L at some point between that time and March 10 at 11 am. Exams submitted after this time will be penalized 1 letter grade per day: for example, an exam that would ordinarily merit an A but was submitted one day late would receive an A-. Unless you contact me in advance to discuss some special circumstances (such as illness), no midterm will be accepted after 11 am on March 13. We will discuss the exam in greater detail as we get closer.

4. Final Exam – 25% of final grade

You will have a take-home final essay exam, which will ask you to synthesize material from the lectures and readings for Weeks 1-15. This exam will be available online before class on May 2 and must be

submitted through D2L at some point between that time and May 9 at 11 am. No late exams will be accepted. We will discuss the final in greater detail as we get closer.

For additional information on requirements and grading (including numerical equivalents for letter grades), see the documents posted throughout the semester on D2L in the folder “Course Documents.”

Communication

The more opportunities we have to speak with one another—to discuss issues relating to the course material, as well as your broader interests—the more productive our time together will be. The best way to speak with me is to meet during my office hours. If you have a prior commitment during that window, send me an email with three alternatives, and we will find a time to meet.

I am available via email, and I will do my best to respond within 36 hours. (If I know that it is likely to take me more than 36 hours to respond to messages, I will inform the class in advance.) However, while email can be an excellent way to deal with administrative issues, it’s rarely an effective way to discuss substantive questions. For example, while email is a good way to let us know of an illness that will keep you out of class or to clarify the procedure for submitting responses, it’s not the best way to discuss questions such as “why do religious thinkers disagree about the permissibility of war,” “what do religious sources say about sexual ethics,” or “why did I receive this particular grade on my midterm exam.” Therefore, for substantive matters, we ask that you attend office hours or set up an alternate meeting time.

Time in the Classroom

Laptop computers may not be used during class, and you should put away (and silence) phones and other electronic devices before each class begins. Of course, if you have a specific need for a computer during class, please speak with me. Similarly, if you have a compelling reason to keep a phone (or phone-like device) turned on, let me know, and we’ll work something out.

Two Tuesday meetings—April 11 and April 18—have been cancelled due to Jewish holidays. I will be holding optional make-up sessions—conversations, really—on the Fridays of each of these weeks for students who wish to explore material relating to the course. I encourage you to attend these sessions, since they offer an opportunity to delve into key readings and topics that are central to the course as a whole. Nevertheless, you will not be penalized if you are absent from these optional sessions. These sessions will take place from 11-12 on April 14 and April 21 in Humanities 230; these dates will also be announced in class, and reminders will be sent out via email and posted on D2L.

INTRODUCTION

Week 1: Religion in a Changing World

January 17: Religion and Ethics, Past and Present

January 19: Religious and Secular in the United States

- United States Constitution: Amendment I
- Abraham Lincoln, “Second Inaugural Address”
- Martin Luther King, Jr., “I Have a Dream,” “The Most Durable Power”

Week 2: Judaism, Christianity, and Contemporary Society

January 24: Judaism and Jewish Ethics (quiz due by 10 am)

- *HarperCollins Study Bible (HCSB)*:* Genesis 17:1-17:7; Exodus 20:1-20:17; Leviticus 19:1-19:37
- Louis Newman, *An Introduction to Jewish Ethics*, 30-35, 56-66, 69-73, 82-83

January 26: Christianity and Christian Ethics

- *HCSB*: Matthew 4:23-5:48, 10:1-10:39; Romans 13:1-13:14
- Sandra Sizer Frankiel, *Christianity: A Way to Salvation*, 491-493
- Glen Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, 81-88, 90-91

UNIT I: VIOLENCE, WAR, AND PEACE

Week 3: The Death Penalty

January 31: Jewish Voices (quiz due by 10 am)

- *HCSB*: Genesis 1:26-1:31, 9:1-9:7, 18:17-18:33; Exodus 21:12-21:25
- David Novak, *Jewish Social Ethics*, 163-166, 169-178
- Elie Spitz, “The Jewish Tradition and Capital Punishment”

February 2: Christian Voices

- *HCSB*: Romans: 13:1-13:7[§]
- C.S. Lewis, “The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment”
- Avery Cardinal Dulles, “Catholicism & Capital Punishment”

Week 4: War and Peace

February 7: Violence and Nonviolence (quiz due by 10 am)

- *HCSB*: Matthew 5:1-5:12, 5:38-5:48; Luke 10:25-10:37
- Paul Ramsey, “Justice in War,” in *The Just War*
- Martin Luther King, Jr., “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence”
- Stanley Hauerwas, “A Sermon on the Sermon on the Mount,” in *Unleashing the Scripture*

➤ **RESPONSE 1 DUE ON THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9, BY 10 AM**

* References to texts from the Bible (both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament) follow this format: [BIBLICAL BOOK] [CHAPTER:VERSE]-[CHAPTER: VERSE]. For example, “Genesis 17:1-17:7” refers to Genesis chapter 17 verse 1 through Genesis chapter 17 verse 7. Similarly, “Matthew 4:23-5:48” refers to Matthew chapter 4 verse 23 through Matthew chapter 5 verse 48.

§ As you may have noticed, these verses have already been assigned during Week 2. Several biblical selections—in particular, ones that are relevant to a variety of contemporary conversations—will be assigned on multiple occasions during the semester.

February 9: Just and Unjust Wars: Classical Approaches

- *HCSB*: Deuteronomy 20:1-20:20; Isaiah 2:1-2:4; Romans: 13:1-13:7
- G.E.M. Anscombe, “The Justice of the Present War Examined”
- Elliot Dorff, “‘A Time for War and a Time for Peace: The Ethics of War and International Intervention,’ 161-180

Week 5: War in the Twenty-First Century

February 14: Drone Warfare (quiz due by 10 am)

- Scott Shane, “The Moral Case for Drones”
- Aryeh Klapper, “What Judaism Says About Drones”
- Ronald Stone, “Drones and Christian Morality,” 259-271

February 16: Torture

- Jean Bethke Elshtain, “Reflection on the Problem of ‘Dirty Hands’”
- Jean Porter, “Torture and the Christian Conscience,” 340-341, 346-353, 357-358

UNIT II: BODIES, MEDICINE, AND SEXUALITY

Week 6: Bioethics

February 21: The End of Life (quiz due by 10 am)

- John Paul II, “Euthanasia”
- Lisa Sowle Cahill, “A ‘Natural Law’ Reconsideration of Euthanasia”

February 23: Genetic Intervention

- Elliot Dorff and Laurie Zoloth, “Summary of the Science of Genetic Intervention”
- Louis Newman, “‘Blessed is the One Who is Good and Who Brings Forth Goodness’: A Jewish Theological Response to the Ethical Challenges of New Genetic Technologies”

Week 7: Abortion

February 28: The Jewish Tradition and Abortion (quiz due by 10 am)

- *HCSB*: Exodus 21:12-21:25
- David Feldman, “This Matter of Abortion”
- Sandra Lubarsky, “Judaism and the Justification of Abortion for Nonmedical Reasons”

➤ **RESPONSE 2 DUE ON THURSDAY, MARCH 2, BY 10 AM**

March 2: Christianity, Feminism, and Abortion

- Beverly Wildung Harrison with Shirley Cloyes, “Theology and Morality of Procreative Choice”
- Sidney Callahan, “Abortion and the Sexual Agenda: A Case for Pro-life Feminism,” 422-435

Week 8: Sexual Ethics

March 7: Judaism and Nonmarital Sex (quiz due by 10 am)

- HCSB: Genesis 1:1-3:24; Song of Solomon (also known as Song of Songs) 1:1-2:17, 4:1-5:8
- Elliot Dorff, “The Reality of Sex Outside Marriage”
- Arthur Waskow, “Eden for Grown-Ups: Toward a New Ethic of Earth, of Sex, and of Creation”
- Sara Meirowitz, “Not Like a Virgin: Talking about Nonmarital Sex”

March 9: Christianity and Nonmarital Sex

- Karen Lebacqz, “Appropriate Vulnerability”

➤ **TAKE-HOME MIDTERM DUE ON FRIDAY, MARCH 10, BY 11 AM**

Week 9: Same-Sex Relationships

March 14: Wrestling with the Law (quiz due by 10 am)

- HCSB: Leviticus 18:1-18:24, 20:1-20:27
- Steven Greenberg, *Wrestling With God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition*, 3-4, 217-223, 231-244
- Selections from essays by Joel Roth and Gordon Tucker

March 16: Listening for Signs (quiz due by 10 am)

- HCSB: Romans 1:18-1:32; Acts 10:44-10:48, 15:1-15:21
- Richard Hays, “Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies”
- Luke Timothy Johnson, “Debate and Discernment, Scripture and the Spirit”

UNIT III: THE ENVIRONMENT

Week 10: Climate Change

March 21: Stewardship (quiz due by 10 am)

- HCSB: Genesis 1:1-2:25, 6:5-6:22, 8:1-9:17; Leviticus 25:1-25:23
- Wendell Berry, “Christianity and the Survival of Creation”

March 23: Climate Change and the World Order

- Francis, “Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si* of the Holy Father Francis,” selections
- Ross Douthat, “Pope Francis’ Call to Action Goes Beyond the Environment”

Week 11: Spring Break: No Classes

Week 12: Environmentalism, Ritual, and Food

April 4: Eco-Judaism (quiz due by 10 am)

- HCSB: Exodus 1:8-1:14, 6:1-8:32, 20:8-20:11; Deuteronomy 5:12-5:15, 16:1-16:17
- Arthur Waskow, “Jewish Environmental Ethics: Intertwining *Adam* with *Adamah*”
- Julian Sinclair, “How Jewish is Jewish Environmentalism?”

➤ **RESPONSE 3 DUE ON THURSDAY, APRIL 6, BY 10 AM**

April 6: Is it Permissible to Eat Meat?

- HCSB: Genesis 1:26-1:31, 9:1-9:7; Leviticus 11:1-11:46; Numbers 28:1-28:31
- George Robinson, “Kashrut/Dietary Laws,” in *Essential Judaism*, 247-251
- Shai Held, “Is Vegetarianism a Biblical Ideal?”
- Aaron Gross, “Jewish Animal Ethics”
- Barry Kornblau, “Slaughterhouses, Sacrifice, and Sanctity”

UNIT IV: CREATING A JUST SOCIETY

Week 13: Economics

April 11: No Class – Passover (quiz due by 10 am on Thursday, April 13)

- Rebecca Blank, “Viewing the Market Economy Through the Lens of Faith,” 11-20, 22-30, 49-54
- Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 165-173

April 13: Poverty and the Market

- HCSB: Leviticus 19:9-19:37; Deuteronomy 15:1-15:11
- Elliot Dorff, “Substantive Justice: A Jewish Approach to Poverty,” 126-128, 130-147, 155-159
- Peter Singer, “The Singer Solution to World Poverty”

Week 14: Race and the Civil Rights Movement

April 18: No Class – Passover (quiz due by 10 am on Thursday, April 20)

- Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham City Jail,” “I Have a Dream,” “Where Do We Go From Here?,” “A Christmas Sermon on Peace”

April 20: Race, Christian Ethics, and the Freedom Seder

- Exodus 1:8-1:14, 2:23-2:25, 6:1-6:7, 13:3-13:10
- “Passover (Pesach) 101,” “The Passover (Pesach) Seder”
- Deena Prichep, “In Freedom Seder, Jews and African-Americans Built a Tradition Together”
- Arthur Waskow, “A Radical Haggadah for Passover”

Week 15: Gender and Feminist Ethics

April 25: Gender and Authority: The Case of Orthodox Women Rabbis (quiz due by 10 am)

- Howard Sachar, “Women Rabbis: A History of the Struggle for Ordination”
- Batya Ungar-Sargon, “Orthodox Yeshiva Set To Ordain Three Women. Just Don’t Call Them ‘Rabbi’”
- Selections from the debate: (1) “2015 Resolution: RCA Policy Concerning Women Rabbis”; (2) Zelda R. Stern and Elana Maryles Sztokman, “Orthodox Women Reach A Milestone”; (3) Avi Weiss, “Women Can Be Rabbis, In Keeping with Tradition”

➤ **RESPONSE 4 DUE ON THURSDAY, APRIL 27, BY 10 AM**

April 27: Gender and Theology: Feminism and Christianity

- *HCSB*: Romans 16:1-16:20; Ephesians 5:21-6:9; 1 Timothy 2:8-2:15
- Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Gender and Christian Ethics"
- Mary Daly, "The Spiritual Revolution: Women's Liberation as Theological Re-education," 121-132

Week 16: Conclusion

May 2: Religion and the Public Square (quiz due by 10 am)

- Barack Obama, "Call to Renewal Keynote Address"

May 4: Review and Conclusion

➤ ***TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAM DUE ON TUESDAY, MAY 9, BY 11 AM***

Additional Information

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner (for exam accommodations provide your letter at least one week prior to the exam) so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or by e-mail at dsinfo@colorado.edu. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see Temporary Injuries guidelines (<http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices/students/temporary-medical-conditions>) under the Quick Links at the Disability Services website (<http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices/>) and discuss your needs with me.

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. In this class, if you have a potential class conflict because of religious observance, you must inform me of that conflict within three weeks of the start of classes. See the campus policy regarding religious observances (<http://www.colorado.edu/policies/observance-religious-holidays-and-absences-classes-andor-exams>) for full details.

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression, age, disability, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. For more information, see the policies on classroom behavior (<http://www.colorado.edu/policies/student-classroom-and-course-related-behavior>) and the student code (<http://www.colorado.edu/osc/>).

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All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy (<http://www.colorado.edu/policies/academic-integrity-policy>) of the institution. Violations of the policy may include: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access, clicker fraud, resubmission, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-735-2273). Students who are found responsible for violating the academic integrity policy will be subject to nonacademic sanctions from the Honor Code Council as well as academic sanctions from the faculty member. Additional information regarding the academic integrity policy can be found at honorcode.colorado.edu.