

**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

Explore the world of religious studies which examines the dynamic sphere of religious rituals and realizations that embody humanity's search for meaning. 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 completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Examine the foundations of religion amidst modern critiques and contemporary challenges.
- Analyze different dimensions of religious anthropology.
- Contextualize the impact of religion and its engagement with social justice.
- Analyze the beliefs, rituals, and practices of Eastern religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
- Develop cultural competence and empathy, understanding diverse religious worldviews in their complexity.
- Improve oral and written communication skills, articulating religious concepts in dialogue with others.

Required Texts

All readings for this course are accessible through [Sakai](#), the learning management system of Loyola University Chicago.

Attendance Policy

Regular attendance and punctuality are academic requirements and professional competencies at the John Felice Rome Center (JFRC), reflecting commitment to collaboration and respect for others' time. Attendance will be tracked using a point system. Each class attended in full will earn students 2 points; tardiness will result in a deduction of 1 point. Excused absences require a doctor's note or official documentation; unexcused absences receive no points. Students should consult the on-campus medical staff if they are sick. Progress updates are available in Sakai's Attendance tab.

This course convenes twice weekly, therefore, a student cannot incur more than two unexcused absences or lose four attendance points without impacting their grade. Additional absences or instances of tardiness will result in a 1% deduction from the final course grade for each occurrence, in alignment with JFRC policy.

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 responsible for 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 students to serve their community in meaningful ways.

Inside/Outside Seminars (I/OS)

An important and regular 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 collaborative, 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 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 provided in Sakai’s Syllabus tab. 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 submit written “Talking Points” which include questions and page citations from the text. These talking points are to be submitted via Sakai and are due at 11:55 pm the evening before the scheduled inside seminar.

Attendance for inside seminar participants is mandatory, given the small group size and the significant grade weight. Inside seminar absences must be 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 incur a grade reduction. This component grants students the opportunity to engage in digital communication, express their perspectives, and demonstrate their creativity in a professional manner and digital platform.

Late Assignments

Overdue or missed assignments will not be accepted for grading without the authorization of the instructor. All assignments must be completed to earn a passing grade in the course. Late submissions will sustain penalties as detailed in the instructions of each assignment. Assignments over two weeks late may receive no credit at all.

Final Exam Policy

Students must complete their final exams at the designated time scheduled by the JFRC administration. Rescheduling the final exam will only be considered if the student has submitted a formal request and obtained written approval from the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. Make-up exams are strictly exceptional and granted solely under approval from the administration and allowance of the professor; travel plans do not constitute a valid justification.

Assistive Technologies in Learning and Production

Distinguishing between critical and non-critical sources is vital for academic integrity and intellectual growth. Students are expected to carefully evaluate non-critical materials such as Wikipedia or large language model text generators, commonly referred to as AI. While these tools may offer an introductory understanding of concepts in an accessible format, they should never replace personal engagement with primary texts or neglect the critical examination of inherent biases and lack of nuances latent in non-critical material. Misuse of these technologies which truncates, rather than expands, the learning process is strictly prohibited.

Learning, according to Jesuit Bernard Lonergan, is a process that consists not so much in reproducing a set of unchanging facts but of entering into a research dynamic that is always open to development. Consequently, the researcher should always: *“Be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible.”* Each principle calls us to a specific mode of engagement with our work: notice what is happening in your environment, interpret the details beyond mere data collection, weigh the evidence to make an informed decision, and act ethically based on your conclusions. Students should commit to critical research that acknowledges both the contributions and limitations of assistive technologies.

Artificial Intelligence Policy

Use of or consultation with generative artificial intelligence (AI) shall be treated analogously to assistance from another person. In particular, using generative AI tools to substantially complete an assignment or exam (e.g., by entering exam or assignment questions) is not permitted. Students should acknowledge the use of generative AI, other than incidental use, and default to disclosing such assistance when in doubt. Transparency with the course instructor is essential. The instructor reserves the right to utilize the latest means of AI detection and to apply these methods to past assignments.

Accessibility Accommodations

Students who have a disability or another condition that may require accommodations must register first with the [Student Accessibility Center](#) (SAC). For academic accommodations while studying abroad in Rome, students are also required to contact the Office of the Academic Dean at the JFRC and communicate this to the professor of this course during the first week of class. Accommodations are only possible after SAC approval and cannot be applied retroactively.

Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam

Course Schedule

Topic	Readings	Date – Assignment
Part 1: Foundations of Religion in the Mirror of Modernity – Controversies & Perspectives		
1. Pascal’s Wager: Gambling on the Divine, Hearts Over Heads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Pensées</i>, B. Pascal 	Sept 3 – Lecture
2. The Masters of Suspicion and Faith: The Case for Compatibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Freud,” <i>Suspicion and Faith</i>, M. Westphal • “Marx,” <i>ibid.</i> • “Nietzsche,” <i>ibid.</i> 	Sept 5 – Disc. Post Sept 10 – I/OS Sept 12 – I/OS
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 	Sept 17 – I/OS Sept 19 – I/OS
4. Altars of the Self: An Analysis of Religion in America	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Religiously Remixed,” <i>Strange Rites</i>, T.I. Burton • “Intuition Religion in America,” <i>ibid.</i> 	Sept 24 – I/OS Sept 26 – I/OS
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 	Oct 1 – I/OS Oct 3 – I/OS
6. Midterm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review • Exam 	Oct 8 – Lecture Oct 10
Fall Break		Oct 11 – 20
Part 2: A Mosaic of Religions – Rituals & Realizations		
7. Whispers of the East: Buddhist Mindfulness, Daoist Non-doing, & Tibetan Meditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Practicing Mindfulness</i>, M. Muesse • <i>Daodejing</i>, Laozi • <i>Stages of Cultivation</i>, Kamalaśīla 	Oct 22 – Disc. Post Oct 24 – I/OS Oct 25 – I/OS
8. Judaism’s Covenant: Bridging the Personal & the Ancient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A Brief Guide to Judaism</i>, N. Brawer • <i>Here All Along: Finding a Deeper Connection</i>, S. Hurwitz • <i>Leviticus as Literature</i>, M. Douglas 	Oct 29 – Disc. Post Oct 31 – I/OS Nov 5 – I/OS
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>Sermons on the Song of Songs</i>, B. Clairvaux 	Nov 7 – Disc. Post Nov 12 – I/OS Nov 14 – I/OS
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>Introduction to Metaphysics: On the Secrets of the Divine Name</i>, M.F. al-Karkari 	Nov 19 – Disc. Post Nov 21 – I/OS Nov 26 – I/OS
Thanksgiving Break		Nov 28 – Dec 1
Postscript: The Future is Now – The Way of the Cyber Pilgrim		
11. God in the Machine? Religion in a Technocratic Dystopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Brave New World</i>, A. Huxley • Exam Review 	Dec 3 – Lecture Dec 5 – Lecture
12. Final Exams		Dec 9 – 12

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.