

## History 4317: W02 History of World Religions

Fall 2023: Dr. Mark Saad Saka

### Course Objective

The objective of this course is to examine and learn about the three “Abrahamic” faiths; what are the three Abrahamic faiths? Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all place their origins in some way or another with the Patriarch from Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham. Even in contemporary geo-politics, the term the “Abraham Accords” which brought Israel and a number of Arab nations together in mutual recognition is based upon their common monotheism rooted in the figure of Abraham, who lived some 4000 years ago in what is today the modern nations of Iraq (where Abraham was born) and Israel where Abraham received his covenant with God and the land.

We will examine the historical development of these three faiths, their founders and major figures, their theological similarities and differences, their history of accommodating the other faiths and their history of conflicts (which are sometimes the most difficult—just ask Richard Dawson and Steven Harvey lol).

I believe this may one of the most important and enjoyable courses you will ever take in your college experience. I have taught it for over thirty years and out of the fifty or more college courses I have taught, I think I enjoy this one the most. Therefore, if the course looks heavy on the reading load and the book list, it is meant to be. For that I do not apologize, for this if the history course you will remember in fifty years, and maybe beyond—no pun intended. It is not for the slacker for if I may quote King Solomon from the Book of Proverbs “Proverbs 13:4 – “The soul of the lazy man (and woman) desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich.” Its your choice and its your course.

### Course Learning Objectives:

At the end of this semester the student (you) should be able to identify the following objectives and themes.

### Course Structure-Where to Go and How:

This course is a web-offered

Required Readings: There is an important note on this: For the two books by Just Gonzalez, on the History of Christianity, the Undergraduate version of this course only requires one or the other: you choose which one you want along with the era, Christianity from its origins to the Reformation (Volume One) or Christianity Since the Reformation (volume 2). For the graduate students both volumes are required. In addition, I am assigning two short novels; one by Naguib Mahfouz and the other by Elie Wiesel—same thing, the undergraduates

choose one of them and the graduate students read both. Both are very enjoyable and the undergraduates may want to read both.

Reza Aslan, "No God But God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam,": Random House, 2011, ISBN # 978-0-8129-8244-2

Justo Gonzalez, "The Story of Christianity, Volume I, the Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation 2010, HarperOne Books, Second Edition ISBN # 978-0061855887

Justo Gonzalez : The Story of Christianity: Volume II, The Reformation to the Present Day, 2010, HarperOne Books, Second Edition, ISBN # 978-0061855894

Martin Goodman, "A History of Judaism" Princeton University Press, 2018, ISBN # 978-0691181271

Naguib Mahfouz, "Children of the Alley: A Novel" Anchor Press,1996, ISBN # 978-0385264730

Elie Wiesel, The Trial of God (as it was held on February 25,1649, in Shamgorod), Shoken Books, reprint, 1995 ISBN # 978-0805210538.

### Course Requirements

There are a number of requirements for this course.

1. Email me within the first week of class and let me know that you have read and understand the syllabus and have located the books.
2. Answer the questions assigned to each of the books, the questions are at the bottom of this syllabus. I prefer that you read and answer the questions in order, it will make more sense. So first, read the History of Judaism by Goodman, Second the History of Christianity by Gonzalez, and third the History of Islam by Aslan, and then the novels.

Distance Education Statement: Students enrolled in distance education courses have equal access to the university's academic support services, library resources, and instructional technology support. For more information about accessing these resources, visit the SRSU website. Students should submit online assignments through Blackboard or SRSU email, which require secure login information to verify students' identities and to protect students' information. The procedures for filing a student complaint are included in the student handbook. Students enrolled in distance education courses at Sul Ross are expected to adhere to all policies pertaining to academic honesty and appropriate student conduct, as described in the student handbook. Students in web-based courses must maintain appropriate equipment and software, according to the needs and requirements of the course, as outlined on the SRSU website.

ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act): Sul Ross State University is committed to equal access in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1973. It is the student's

responsibility to initiate a request for accessibility services. Students who need accessibility services should contact Rebecca Wren at 432-837-8691; Ferguson Hall Room 112.

#### **Marketability Skills of a History Major**

**SLO 1—The history student will demonstrate historical research skills in a logically organized, written paper that is mechanically correct and supported by relevant documentation of historical content.**

**Marketable skills---Students can identify useful resources from a pool of data.**

**Students can select and organize data in a relevant manner.**

**Students can make written presentations to various audiences.**

**SLO 2—The history student will demonstrate the ability to write about topics in historiography and how those topics are interpreted.**

**Marketable skills---Students can utilize data to persuade various audiences.**

**Students can utilize data to generate and strengthen ideas.**

**Students can decipher stances adopted by various individuals.**

**SLO 3—The history student will demonstrate knowledge of American History, World History, and NonAmerican History.**

**Marketable Skills---Students can meet deadlines in a successful manner.**

**Students can discharge responsibilities in an adequate manner.**

**Students can manage the absorption of data.**

#### **Requirements for the Research Paper**

**Due: each of you will submit your proposed final paper topics.**

**You must consult with the professor about possible paper topics prior to making your final decision. You may choose any subject relevant to the theme and chronology of this seminar. This essay must have a strong, coherent thesis statement, which will be supported by a minimum of 3 scholarly sources. These may include works from the required, supplemental, and/or recommended reading lists.**

**Papers must be typed or word-processed in 12-point fonts (Times New Roman, Arial, or Calibri), double-spaced, with one-inch margins all around. All papers will be evaluated on style and content and therefore should be well-written and free of grammatical errors. Papers that are not formatted according to guidelines and requirements will be dropped one letter grade.**

**Topic selection must occur no later than Friday June 12. It is expected that each of you will consult with me to discuss possible paper topics prior to making your final decisions. You may choose any subject relative to the theme of this seminar, and your papers must be based on both primary and secondary sources. You will be required to include at least six (6) (scholarly, 3 books and no more than three internet sources in your final paper.**

**Papers will be evaluated on the following points:**

- 1. strength of your historical arguments and content**
- 2. how well you have used historical evidence to support your arguments • composition (i.e., spelling, grammar, sentence structure) • form (i.e., correct citation)**

**Academic Honesty** The University expects all students to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is beyond reproach and to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of their classroom. The University may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty, including but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work, plagiarism, collusion, and the abuse of resource materials. "Cheating" includes: 1. Copying from another student's test paper, laboratory report, other report, or computer files, data listings, and/or programs, or allowing another student to copy from same. 2. Using, during a test, materials not authorized by the person giving the test. 3. Collaborating, without authorization, with another person during an examination or in preparing academic work. 4. Knowingly, and without authorization, using, buying, selling, stealing, transporting, soliciting, copying, or possessing, in whole or in part, the contents of a nonadministered test. 5. Substituting for another student; permitting any other person, or otherwise assisting any other person to substitute for oneself or for another student in the taking of an examination or test or the preparation of academic work to be submitted for academic credit. 6. Bribing another person to obtain a non-administered test or information about a nonadministered test. 7. Purchasing, or otherwise acquiring and submitting as one's own work any research paper or other writing assignment prepared by an individual or firm. This section does not apply to the typing of a rough and/or final version of an assignment by a professional typist. 8. "Plagiarism" means the appropriation and the unacknowledged incorporation of another's work or idea in one's own written work offered for credit. 9. "Collusion" means the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing written work offered for credit. 10. "Abuse of resource materials" means the mutilation, destruction, concealment, theft or alteration of materials provided to assist students in the mastery of course materials. 11. "Academic work" means the preparation of an essay, dissertation, thesis, report, problem, assignment, or other project that the student submits as a course requirement or for a grade. 12. "Falsification of Data" means the representation, claim, or use of research, data, statistics, records, files, results, or information that is falsified, fabricated, fraudulently altered, or otherwise misappropriated or misrepresented.

All academic dishonesty cases may be first considered and reviewed by the faculty member. If the faculty member believes that an academic penalty is necessary, he/she may assign a penalty but must notify the student of his/her right to appeal to the department chair, the dean and eventually, to the Provost and Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs before imposition of the penalty. At each step in the process, the student shall be entitled to written notice of the offense and/or of the administrative decision, an

**opportunity to respond, and an impartial disposition as to the merits of his/her case. The decision of the Provost and Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs shall be final.**

**Book Review Questions: A History of Judaism by Martin Goodman**

**1. Who is Martin Goodman? What other books has he written? What is his area (or areas) of “expertise”?**

**2. The author breaks the history of Judaism into five chronological eras.**

**2-A. How did Judaism originate in the years 2000 B.C.E. through 70 C.E.? How was the Bible formed? How was the Temple and Synagogue organized for worship? What role does Moses play in the formation and development of Judaism?**

**2-B. How did Jews interpret the Torah in the crucial years 200 B.C.E. through 70 C.E. and meet the cultural, philosophical, and religious challenges of Graeco-Roman hegemony? What four groups emerged during this era and how does this explore the idea of diversity within Judaism? How did Christianity represent the limits of diversity within Judaism? Why does the Jewish Revolt and the fall of the Second Temple represent a critical watershed in the history of Judaism? How did Judaism develop its ideas and forms in the aftermath of the fall of the Second Temple?**

**2-C; How did Rabbinical Judaism survive under the twin systems of Crescent and Cross? (Christianity and Islam)? How did it survive with a Temple in both areas of the West? Who was Rabbi Moses Maimonides and why is he considered a pivotal figure in medieval Judaism?**

**2-D; How did Judaism change and shift and meet the challenges of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment?**

**2-E; How has Judaism develop into three branches (Reform, Conservative and Orthodox) and how has the formation of the modern state of Israel represented a milestone in modern Jewish history? What are the challenges facing modern Judasim?**

### **Book Review Questions for “No God but God” by Reza Aslan**

- 1. Who is Reza Aslan? What other books has he written? What is his area of expertise?**
- 2. How did Islam originate in the Arabian Desert under the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad? What were the core tenants of his religious teachings, ideas, and how did the new faith compare with the other main forms of mono-theistic faiths of Judaism and Christianity? Why is Islam considered an “Abrahamic” faith? (chapters 1-4)**
- 3. How did Islam expand in the early years and first centuries. How did the split between the Sunni branch of Islam and the Shiite branch of Islam form and develop? (chapter 4 and 7)**
- 4. How does Aslan deal with the issue of Jihad in Islam? (chapter 4)**
- 5. How has Islamic theology and law developed in the formative years and through the modern age (chapter 6)?**
- 6. Who and what are Sufis and Sufiism? What are the tenants of Sufiism and how does it differ from the Sunni and Shiite branches of Islam (chapter 8)?**
- 7. What impact did European colonialism have on Islam and how did Islam respond (chapter 9)?**
- 8. What are the challenges Islam faces in the future with such issues as democracy, women’s rights, Islam in Europe, social media and the internet in the age of globalization, etc. (chapter 10)?**

**Book Review Questions for Justo Gonzalez "The History of Christianity Volume I: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation."**

- 1. How did Christianity emerge as a separate faith from its Jewish origins? How did the Church in Jerusalem develop and how and why did the early Church expand its missionizing to the Gentiles. What role did persecution by the Roman State play in the formation of Christianity?**
- 2. How did alternative beliefs such as Gnosticism, Marcionism, etc give rise to both Christian apologetics as well as the Creeds? Who were the early Church leaders who helped shape early Christian beliefs?**
- 3. How did Christianity move from a persecuted underground faith to the faith of Empire? Who was Constantine and how did he shape the Imperial Church and its reactions to Donatism and Arianism? Who was Athanasius and how did he shape the Nicene Council and the Nicene Creed? Who were the Cappadocians?**
- 4. How did the Medieval Catholic Church form and save Western civilization in the collapse of the Roman Empire? How did the Eastern Church develop and become the imperial faith of the Byzantine Empire? What was monasticism? What role did the challenge of Islam play in the formation of Christian identity in both the Eastern and the Western Church?**
- 5. What brought about the collapse of the Medieval Church including the split between the eastern orthodox and Western Catholic Churches?**
- 6. How did Spain and Portugal sow the seeds of the beginning of Colonial Christianity? How was Mexico Catholicized?**

**Book Review Questions for Justo Gonzalez "The History of Christianity: Volume II: the Reformation to the Present Day."**

- 1. What gave rise to the Protestant Reformation? Who was Martin Luther and what was the basis of the new Protestant theology as well as the Swiss Reformation? Who were the Radical Reformers and what was their message? Who was John Calvin and what were the tenants of "Calvinism"? How did the Catholic Church respond to the Reformation with the Counter - Reformation?**
- 2. How did the Reformation split Europe and the Thirty Years War? Who were the Puritans and what did they believe? Who were the Pietists and what did they believe? Who were the**

**Spiritualists and what did they believe? How did Christianity shape the culture of the thirteen American colonies?**

- 3. How did the American and French Revolutions challenge Christianity, or accommodate it, or encourage it? How did modernity challenge Christianity and how did Christianity respond to the challenges of Liberalism, Nationalism, Secularism, Darwinian Evolution?**
- 4. How did Christianity spread through Catholic and Protestant Missionaries to the Global South (Asia, Latin America)?**
- 5. What challenges did the First and Second World wars have upon Christianity?**
- 6. How and why is the future of Christianity no longer in Europe and the “West” but in the Global South?**

**Book Review Questions for “Children of the Alley” (Or Children of Gabalawi by Naguib Mahfouz**

- 1. Who is Naguib Mahfouz? Where is he from? What other books has he written and why do you think this book won a Nobel Prize in Literature?**
- 2. This is an allegory for the three Abrahamic faiths? What do I mean by that? Who is Gabalawi? Who is Adham, Gabal, Rifaa, and Qassem, Rafa and other characters?**
- 3. What is the moral or lessons of the novel?**
- 4. Did you enjoy this novel?**

**Book Review Questions for the “Trial of God” (as it was held on February 25,1649 in Shamgorod) by Elie Wiesel.**

- 1. Who is Elie Wiesel? What are some of his major accomplishments in life?**
- 2. This book (actually written as a play) is rooted in part on the Biblical Book of Job. Why?**
- 3. Although this is an event that occurred in what is today modern day Ukraine, it is obviously based on real event in what historical event?**
- 4. Who is Sam?**
- 5. Did you enjoy this novel/play?**