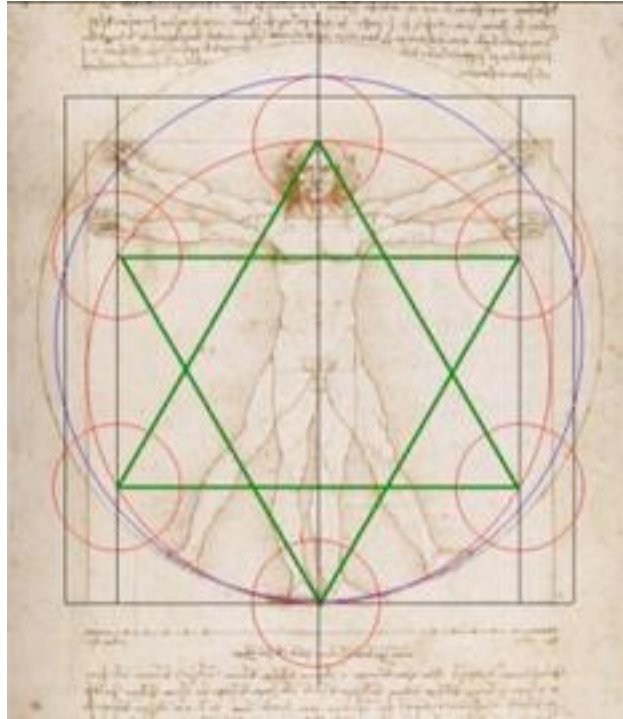


Religion in Western Culture

MLS 603 - Spring Term 2014

Steve Phelan



GOALS OF THE COURSE:

1. To erect the scaffold on which to arrange the history of western civilization.
2. To learn how to read a book of religion.
3. To follow the evolution of religious concepts through historical change.
4. To learn how to focus a course and a question into a project of research with depth and clarity.

5. To learn how to write a term paper at the graduate level.
6. To bridge the period between the classical era of Greece and the modern age of science and technology.
7. Better to understand the roots of the current crisis and its religious heritage.
8. To grow lasting friendships through appreciation of our differences.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The Judaeo-Christian culture of Europe with its mixtures of Greek philosophy and modern science/technology is in crisis, or at least on trial, in the collapse of capitalism and in the current conflicts of the Middle East and across the globe. This course will move quickly over three millennia on the stepping stones of the great books—the Torah, the Bible, and the Koran backed up by their rich oral and critical traditions—to discover in the Roman Empire, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment how those traditions are embodied in some of the most powerful and creative voices of western culture.

The theme of this year's course will be The Great Transformations. Our initial questions will revolve around the universal religious impulse and the manifestations of it in creation mythology (Aristotle: *mythos* = story), prophecy, and apocalypse. Here we see oral cultures evolving concepts of divinity in poetic forms conducive to ritual and sacrifice. In the second phase, religion and God become embodied in a text which has both a letter and a spirit. In this phase of the course, we will investigate the modes of interpretation.

Both of these manifestations of religion exist inside the political and social dimensions of a changing human society. In the third phase of the course we will study some of these “external” factors. How do the three religions of the inspired book react to the Golden Age of Greek culture and its relatively secular stance? What happens when indigenous religion meets up with nation and empire, with collapse of empire and

expansion to new worlds? As philosophy and science grow, how does religion adapt? What do feudalism and democracy have to do with religion? Why does religious fervor seem always eventually to divide the congregation? How important or even tenable are the basic theological concepts?

In the process of building this foundation for our entire body of knowledge, we will focus on the questions of peace, conflict, war, holy land, proselytism, exclusion/inclusion, community, capital markets, and social justice. All three religions have profound understanding and rich textures of ideals for human growth and development. So where do the crusades and holocausts and suicide bombings fit in?

Week	Date	Reading Assignments and Classroom Activities
1)	Jan. 13	Introduction and Library Orientation
		Emergence: Your Story of Creation
		Žižek: God in Pain: Inversions of Apocalypse
2)	Jan. 20	In Honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. - no class Letter from a Birmingham City Jail
3)	Jan. 27	Ancient Israel, Judaism, and The Story of Creation
		The Bible: <i>Genesis</i> , chaps. 1-11 read carefully, then scan the rest, especially the tradition of prophecy
topic1		Karen Armstrong: <i>Holy War</i> , vii-75
		Creation mythology: bring in one, non-western creation account

4)	Feb. 3	The Formation of Christianity: From the Gospels to Irenaeus
		The Bible: John's Gospel
topic2		John D. Crosson: <i>Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography</i>
	*	Matthew, Mark, Luke, or Thomas (Gnosticism)
5)	Feb. 10	Christianity, Empire, and Neoplatonism:
		Aurelius Augustine: <i>The Confessions</i> , Books 1-10
		Augustine: <i>The City of God</i> and the fall of Rome
6)	Feb. 17	The Formation of Islam and its Medieval Influences
		Armstrong: 147-274
	*	The Koran: everyone bring some excerpts
7)	Feb. 24	The Age of Chivalry:
		<i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>
biblio	*	<i>The Song of Roland</i> or Chretien de Troyes (Percival)
	Mar. 1	Haydn's Creation - 7:30 pm
	Mar. 2	Bach's St. John's Passion - 3 pm
	Mar. 3-9	Spring Break - get wild in Bartram's Florida
8)	Mar. 10	Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism:
		Thomas Aquinas: <i>On Politics and Ethics</i> , 3-111
	*	Panofsky or Mâle
9)	Mar. 17	The Medieval World View:

Thesis		Dante Alighieri: <i>The Inferno</i>
outline	*	Geoffrey Chaucer: <i>The Canterbury Tales</i>
10)	Mar. 24	Medieval Mysticism:
		Julian of Norwich: <i>Revelations of Divine Love</i>
	*	Meister Eckhart: Selections to be provided
11)	Mar. 31	Workshop on research papers:
full draft		Bring your stuff: notecards, outlines, definitions, thesis statement, unanswered questions, laptop, rough drafts
12)	Apr. 7	Humanism and The Northern Renaissance:
		Desiderius Erasmus: <i>The Praise of Folly</i>
	*	Thomas More: <i>Utopia</i>
13)	Apr. 14	The Reformation:
		Martin Luther: <i>Selections</i> , 42-98, 166-206, 363-503
	*	John Calvin, George Fox, Cotton Mather, etc.
home	Apr. 17	Full paper due with all drafts and readers' comments
14)	April 21	Science and the Enlightenment: Galileo's Telescope of Creation
		Galileo Galilei: <i>Discoveries and Opinions</i> , first three parts with intros
	*	William Bartram: "Animal Dignity"

15)	April 28	Christian Humanism and the End of the Epic
		John Milton: <i>Paradise Lost</i> , esp. Books I-II, VIII-IX, outline of the twelve books
	*	Johann Sebastian Bach - Rev. Ben Cox
16)	May 5	Final: feast or fast?

* = an opportunity for an alternate reading and/or report (see below)

TEXT BOOKS:

For the most part, the specific texts which I will be using in class have been ordered and are available in the Rollins Bookstore. Most of these classics are available as well in various translations, illustrations, and editions via the internet, so follow your own wits and budgets and tablets.

COURSEWORK:

Each student will sign up for one focus paper and one report on different weeks during the term. The paper (600-800 words) will focus on a single idea suggested by the readings for the week and ***valuable for the student's own research project***. It must have a clear and unified approach while demonstrating critical perspective. During the class period, the student will summarize the focus paper as a way of initiating discussion. If you are thoroughly familiar with the reading for the week, you may do your focus paper or give an introductory report on an alternate item indicated by the asterisk. Please negotiate this in advance so that we don't have more than one student doing the alternate text in any given week.

A term paper of 10-15 pages will be due on April 17 (*nota bene*: not a class day) on a subject of personal choice relevant both to the course and the issues of our times. Choose a topic for which you have some passion or concern. The paper should have a clear focus and deal reasonably with the historical context. In other words, even if you focus on one author or text, you are required through your library and internet research to give evidence from outside the author and text. Suggested deadlines to give yourself: topic and prospectus by week 3 (email to me for comments), bibliography by week 7, thesis statement and outline for the workshop at week 9, and first full draft by week 11. The final draft in MLA documentation, including a bibliography, is due at my front door by 7 pm, Friday, April 17th. The penalty for a late paper is one grade (e.g. a late A = A-).

GRADE FORMULA:

Participation: 40% (including focus paper and oral report = 10%)
Term paper: 40%
Final examination essay: 20%

COMMUNICATION:

Professor of English Emeritus Steve Phelan
1343 Audubon Rd.
Maitland, FL 32751
407-644-9025 (home)
sphelan@rollins.edu (email)

<http://web.rollins.edu/~sphelan/>

provides course concepts, syllabi, my cv, and some of my writings