Syllabus
Religious Studies 115.01
Major Western Religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Spring 2007
MWF 10:00, Steiner 106

Prof. Tyler Roberts Steiner Hall 203
Office Hours: T, TH 1-3 x-4472; robertst@grinnell.edu

Course Description
An introductory study of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These traditions share
much in common, for each have their roots in the Hebrew Scriptures, each is
monotheistic, and each has had a formative impact on global culture and, in
particular, the cultures of the Mediterranean world, Europe, and the Americas. In the
context of these and other commonalities, we will explore the practices, ideas, and
histories that make each tradition distinctive; we will consider their interactions with
each other; and we will discuss the project of studying religion in general.

Course Requirements and Grading
1) Attendance/Participation (10% of final grade)
You are expected to attend all class sessions having completed the assigned
reading and prepared to participate in all class activities. More than one or two
absences or late arrivals will have a negative impact on your final grade.

2) Group Work (30% of final grade)
At the beginning of the semester, you will be assigned to a small group of 4-5
students with whom you will meet regularly during the semester for Friday discussion
groups and for preparing an in-class presentation at the end of the semester. This
latter will involve researching and reporting on a contemporary event, debate, or
issue that involves members of at least two of the three religious traditions we are
studying. Your group will present this work to the class during the last two weeks of
the semester. Peer evaluation will be significant part of your group work grade.

3) Papers (20% of final grade)
Two papers will be assigned in the course of the semester, one examining the
relation between scripture and tradition (due Feb. 23) and the other on Thomas
Merton’s Life and Holiness (due April 20).

4) Quick Quizzes and Reflection Papers (10%)
Roughly once a week I will open class with a quick quiz that will ask you to define
terms or elucidate concepts from the assigned readings or I will ask you, at the end
of class, to write a paragraph reflecting on some aspect of that day’s class session.

5) Midterm (10%) and Final Exam (20%)

Reading and Assignment Schedule
Week 1: In the Beginning...
Jan 22: Intro
Jan 24: Bruce Feiler, Abraham, 3-35
F. E. Peters, The Children of Abraham, 1-6
Corrigan, et al. Readings in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, 1-6
Jan 26: Feiler, 36-110
The Bible, Gen. 15-25

Week 2: Abraham
Jan. 29: Feiler, 113-135
Jan. 31: Feiler, 136-159
Feb. 2: Feiler, 160-end

Week 3: Historical Origins: Judaism and Christianity
Feb. 5: Peters, 6-20
JCI, 7-17
Feb. 7: Peters, 31-40
JCI, 21-31f
Feb. 9: Discussion Meetings
W. Oxtoby, ed., World Religions: Western Traditions, “Introducing Judaism”*

Week 4: Historical Origins: Islam
Feb. 12: Karen Armstrong, Muhammed, Chaps. Intro-Chap 2
Peters, 31-40
Feb. 14: Armstrong, Chaps. 3-4
JCI, 67-70
Feb. 16: Discussion Meetings
Armstrong, Chap. 5

Week 5: Community and Law
Feb. 19: Peters, 41-66
Feb. 21: Peters, 67-84
Feb. 23: Video: Inside Mecca
Paper #1 Due

Week 6: Scriptures and Traditions
Feb. 26: Peters, 85-94
JCI, 17-22, 157-160, 164-7, 170-82, 184-6, 187-95, 198-202
Feb. 28: Peters, 94-102
JCI, 71-86
Mar. 1: Discussion Meetings
New Testament, The Gospels of Mark and John

Week 7: Worship
Mar. 5: Peters, 103-115
Mar. 7: JCI, 203-254
Mar. 9: Discussion Meetings
View: A Life Apart

Week 8: God
Mar. 12: Peters, 138-172
Mar. 14: JCI, 87-155
Mar. 16: Midterm Exam

Week 9: Life of the Spirit
Apr. 2: Peters, 116-137
Thomas Merton, 7-52
Apr. 4: Thomas Merton, 54-83
Apr. 6: Discussion Meetings
Thomas Merton, 86-119

Week 10: Reformations and Modernities
Apr. 9: JCI, 263-5, 317-27
Apr. 11: JCI, 278-285, 337-356
Apr. 13: JCI, 286-304, 357-376
Discussion Meetings
View Jesus Camp

Week 11: Contemporary Realities
Apr. 16: Halevi, Intro and Chap. 1
Apr. 18: Halevi, Chaps. 2-3
Apr. 20: Video: Nazrah
Paper #2 Due

Week 12: Contemporary Realities
Apr. 23: Halevi, Chaps. 4-5
Apr. 25: Halevi, finish
Apr. 27: Group Presentations

Week 13: Group Presentations

Week 14: Group Presentations and Class Summary

*Readings on reserve

Texts for Purchase at Bookstore
Karen Armstrong, Muhammed: A Prophet for Our Time
Corrigan et al., Readings in Judaism, Christianity and Islam
Bruce Feiler, Abraham
Yossi Halevi, At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden
Thomas Merton, Life and Holiness
F. E. Peters, The Children of Abraham

Discussion Meetings
Early in the semester, the class will be divided into six groups of four or five students. On the Fridays designated above as “Discussion Meetings” one of these groups will meet together with me for a “Seminar” discussion of assigned material and the other groups will meet individually for “Small Group” discussion of the same material, with one member of each group assigned to be the discussion leader.

1) Seminars
When your group is participating in the Seminar discussion with me, you are expected to come to the discussion having written a one-page reflection paper that discusses an issue from the reading that you think would be worth discussing further with the group. It might consist of briefly developing a question you have about the reading, identifying and reflecting on a point in the reading you find particularly illuminating or provocative, or relating the reading in some way to other issues we have treated in the class. Your reflection papers and your participation in the seminar meeting will count for about 1/3 of your “Group” grade.

2) Small Groups
Each member of your small group must act as leader of the group on one occasion. Your group should decide on a leadership schedule and then submit that schedule to me. You should also decide how you are going to contact each other to arrange meetings. Small groups can meet anywhere that is convenient for the members.

The leader should take responsibility for initiating conversation, guiding it in constructive ways, and facilitating everyone’s participation. The leader should prepare an agenda for the meeting. This means that he or she should carefully do the assigned reading and then prepare several written questions that will help the group to productively discuss and assess the readings. Generally, it is a good idea to begin devote some time in discussion to the interpretation and evaluation of the reading. On same days, this will take all your time. But you might also want to
consider the implications of the assigned reading for your own experience, current events, things that you are learning in other courses, etc. Leaders may also want to help direct the group's attention to issues or questions that have come up in previous meetings. Near the end of the meeting, it would be a good idea to ask the members of your group to help you identify the three to five main points they think most important for the report each group leader must submit to me after the discussion.

Your report should take the following form. The first page will be the agenda you prepared. You should note any absences from the small group meeting. Then please include a 2-3 page summary of the main issues your group discussed. The summary should capture the progression of the discussion, rather than simply list memorable comments or observations. Even if the discussion was casual, the report should not be. The leader's responsibility is to analyze the discussion so that you can convey its critical and constructive substance.

Please submit your reports to me or to my mailbox in Steiner no later than Monday's class following the discussion.