

SEMESTER: SPRING 2023

COURSE TITLE: Topics in Comparative Theology

COURSE NUMBER/SECTION: THST 4080 01

TIMES/DAYS: MW 9:55–11:35

INSTRUCTOR: Prof. Saqib Hussain

CORE AREA: N/A

FLAGGED: N/A

COURSE DESCRIPTION/PRINCIPAL TOPICS

Multiple religious perspectives will be utilized in this course to explore one or more topics of theological concern, such as violence and nonviolence, myth and symbol, modes of spirituality, images of God, and/or multicultural religious presence in Los Angeles.

More specifically, the course looks at scriptural narratives shared across the Abrahamic faiths as found in their sacred texts and as interpreted by faith communities, and explores what we can learn about the theology of each tradition from both the overlaps and divergences across these stories.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this course students will: 1) demonstrate knowledge of the foundational scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and their respective interpretive traditions; 2) demonstrate an understanding of the core theological claims of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, looking at both shared as well as conflicting claims, and the manner and extent to which these claims have been shaped as the religious traditions have engaged with each other; 3) demonstrate that they can engage both empathetically and critically with conflicting religious claims; 4) through class participation and written assignments improve their verbal and written skills.

PREREQUISITES/RECOMMENDED BACKGROUND

THST majors/minors only, or by permission of instructor.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Bible with and without Jesus: How Jews and Christians Read the Same Stories Differently* (New York: HarperOne, 2020).

Robert C. Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings: Early Encounters of Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

COURSE WORK/EXPECTATIONS

- Weekly readings
- Weekly quizzes
- Written midterm exam
- Written final exam

SEMESTER: SPRING 2023

COURSE TITLE: Major Theological and Religious Theme (The Colors and Sounds of the Dharma: Ritual, Visual and Material Culture of East Asian Buddhism)

COURSE NUMBER/SECTION: THST 4901 01

TIMES/DAYS: MW 1:45pm-3:25pm

INSTRUCTOR: Eric Haruki Swanson

COURSE DESCRIPTION/PRINCIPAL TOPICS

Students in this class will be introduced to the world of East Asian Buddhism through the lens of ritual, visual and material culture. The course will cover the core teachings of Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, Buddhist conceptions of the universe, and its pantheon of enlightened beings and celestial deities. It will spotlight specific works of religious art as the focus of analysis, including statues and paintings of Buddhist deities, paintings of the Buddhist Pure Land, illustrated scrolls of Buddhist hagiography, esoteric Buddhist mandalas, and Chan/Zen paintings. As they are introduced to a vast range of artistic expressions seen in East Asian Buddhism, students will be asked to consider how the Buddhist tradition viewed the limitations of language and text, and will evaluate how Buddhist concepts of faith, salvation, death, and emptiness were negotiated through ritual, visual, and material culture. For the final project, students will be asked to conduct research and write a paper on a specific Buddhist painting or sculpture.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

- SL01: Identify and discuss core Buddhist concepts, historical figures, and texts in the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, particularly in how they were articulated in East Asia;
- SL02: Consider new approaches in the study of religion through the analysis of visual culture;
- SL03: Critically examine the teachings and practices of the Buddhist tradition;
- SL04: Familiarize oneself with Buddhist communities and art museums in the Los Angeles area;
- SL05: Construct a coherent argument through engagement with scholarly sources;
- SL06: Produce an annotated bibliography on a topic related to the course;
- SL07: Express and interpret ideas through constructive discussions with peers;
- SL08: Prepare, practice, and deliver an oral presentation.

PREREQUISITES/RECOMMENDED BACKGROUND

Students must have the instructor's permission to enroll or be majors or minors in Theological Studies.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Dobbins, James C. *Behold the Buddha: Religious Meanings of Japanese Buddhist Icons*. University of Hawaii Press, 2020.
- Jones, Charles B. *Pure Land: History, Tradition, and Practice*. Shambala, 2021.

All other readings will be posted on Brightspace

COURSE WORK/EXPECTATIONS

The workload is consistent with a four-unit writing intensive engaged learning course. One unit is defined by LMU as a minimum of three hours of work by an average student per week for a fifteen-week semester. The course consists of interactive lectures and in-class discussion and exercises. Students should be prepared to actively contribute to conversations on the assigned readings and class discussions.