

SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS

Colorado State University, Academic Partner

Voyage:	Fall 2019
Discipline:	Philosophy and Religion
Course Number and Title:	PHIL 479 Topics in Comparative Religions
Division:	Upper
Faculty Name:	James D. Bratt
Semester Credit Hours:	3

Prerequisites: One (1) lower-division philosophy or religion course OR one (1) introductory-level course in philosophy, literature, or religious studies as approved by the instructor.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course uses auto/biographies of people from different religious traditions encountered on the Fall 2019 Semester at Sea to explore how personal spiritual dynamics intersect with lived social reality, effecting changes in the person, the tradition, and the wider world. We begin with Christopher Columbus and the religious dimension of the vision that animated his voyages of exploration with profound effects on the greater Atlantic world. Our eastward trek across the Mediterranean will be following the travels of Dona Gracia Mendes, a Jewish businesswoman driven into exile by the other Spanish development of 1492. Visiting Morocco, we will read the memoir that Fatima Mernissi, a pioneering Muslim feminist, wrote of her childhood passed in a traditional harem in that country. As we cross from Ghana to Brazil we will study the classic autobiography of Olaudah Equiano who was enslaved in West Africa and shipped to the Western Hemisphere, where he became one of the most traveled persons of his age, both at sea and in his soul. As we cross the Caribbean, we will consider the life of Oscar Romero, the martyred Archbishop of El Salvador recently beatified by the Vatican for his work on behalf of the oppressed. Our course will conclude with a memoir by Emily Raboteau, who traversed many of the same sites our voyage will visit. Her keen reflections upon her journey will serve well to trigger similar considerations of our own.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course students will have demonstrated the capacity to:

1. understand personal religious accounts in terms of an individual's developmental dynamics, social and historical setting, and faith tradition.
2. draw informed and nuanced comparisons across various individual case studies and faith traditions.
3. incorporate data and experiences at field sites to enrich or alter impressions gained from reading.
4. speak more knowledgeably about major world religions.

5. reflect in a more intelligent and self-critical manner upon their own religious, spiritual, or philosophical commitments and trajectory, based upon their encounters on ship and on shore.

On the Academic Study of Religion

This course takes religious convictions very seriously—both those of the subjects we study and our own. It assumes that—whether these convictions are understood as “religious” in the traditional sense of that term, or as “spiritual” or “philosophical” or “ethical” as these labels have come to be used—everyone has some basic outlook on life, a framework or worldview or set of operating assumptions by which we approach and interpret our everyday experience as well as our larger, higher, or longer-term goals in life. Our own interpretive frames will inevitably shape how we respond to the religious accounts in this course; our learning will be enhanced if the opposite is also the case, that is, if our subjects’ deepest convictions challenge our own.

That said, let it be clear: there is no “orthodox” religious position required in this course! You will not do better or worse if you are Christian, Jewish, Muslim, etc., etc. or a “none of the above.” You might benefit by being an insider to one of these traditions when we take up an account that comes out of it, and you are most welcome to share that perspective at that time. You may also benefit—and help the group—in other ways if you are an outsider. In any case, this course does not aim to have you convert to or from any particular faith, nor to disabuse you of any or all. It assumes, instead,

- that religion has been a very important domain for thinking about the big questions in life and for undertaking (for better or worse) massive efforts to change the world according to its lights;
- that understanding religion well is thus crucial for understanding different lands and cultures and historical action—and ourselves.

Our aim is simply to enhance that understanding via reading and informed on-shore experience. I have chosen the genre of auto/biography because it provides an inviting channel into the different worlds we will be encountering on this voyage, and into our own critical self-understanding.

This course does require you to confront your set of basic convictions and to reflect on them as we proceed. If you end up confirmed in your core convictions, that’s fine—hopefully, they will be better informed, more nuanced, and more deliberately chosen than simply absorbed from your upbringing. If you come away with more doubts about your inherited tradition or another—or all others—that’s fine too, so long as the same conditions apply. Likewise, if you’re inclined to change from one to another, or from none to one.... The only non-negotiable is that you show respect for any and all of them, that you try to see the world from inside the person and tradition we’re studying at the moment so that you can render their beliefs in a way that they would recognize as authentic.

Along the way you will be required—and always encouraged—to visit houses of worship of various faiths. To prepare for that, please read the relevant chapters of Stuart Matlins and Arthur Megida, eds., *How to Be a Perfect Stranger: The Essential Religious Etiquette Handbook*, found in the Ship’s library. Be attentive to the particularities of dress code,

demeanor, photography, and conversation that might apply to these site visits. **Always** be sure you have permission before you photograph or otherwise record an individual, artifact, or religious ceremony.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

AUTHOR: Carol Delaney
TITLE: *Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem*
PUBLISHER: Free Press
ISBN #: 978-1439102374
DATE/EDITION: 2012/paperback

AUTHOR: Marianna Birnbaum
TITLE: *The Long Journey of Gracia Mendes*
PUBLISHER: Central European Press
ISBN #: 978-9639241787
DATE/EDITION: 2004 paperback

AUTHOR: Fatima Mernissi
TITLE: *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*
PUBLISHER: Perseus Books
ISBN #: 978-0201489378
DATE/EDITION: 1995/1st edition, paperback

AUTHOR: Olaudah Equiano
TITLE: *The Interesting Narrative...*
PUBLISHER: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform
ISBN #: 978-1537562346
DATE/EDITION: 2016, paperback

AUTHOR: Kevin Clarke
TITLE: *Oscar Romero: Love Must Win Out*
PUBLISHER: Liturgical Press
ISBN #: 978-0814637579
DATE/EDITION: 2014, paperback

AUTHOR: Emily Raboteau
TITLE: *Searching for Zion*
PUBLISHER: Grove Press
ISBN #: 978-0802122278
DATE/EDITION: 2014/paperback

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE

Depart Amsterdam, The Netherlands — September 9

A1—September 11 *Introduction*

Review of syllabus, assignments, and grading. Discussion of the purpose of the academic study of religion: not proselytization or debunking but empathic and critical understanding. Opening discussion of the dynamics between personal experience, setting, and events: not utter autonomy or determinism but creative interaction.

PART I

In the year 1492 the ‘Christian monarchs’ of Spain undertook three epochal initiatives. They completed the ‘reconquest’ of the Iberian Peninsula from Islamic rulers by subduing Granada, they authorized Columbus’s voyage across the Atlantic, and they declared that Spain’s substantial Jewish population must either convert to Christianity or go into exile. In this part of the course we will examine two prominent lives that were involved in this dramatic turn and the role played by religion in the mix. Columbus himself intended his voyages to help bring history to its Christian climax, while Dona Gracia Mendes, a prominent Jewish businesswoman, had to journey from Spain to Antwerp to Italy to present-day Croatia before finding permanent harbor in Istanbul. Our voyage eastward across the Mediterranean will re-trace much of hers, while our journeys in the Atlantic Ocean will trace a world indeed radically re-made by Columbus’s unexpected discoveries therein. Our special interest will be to see how religion affected, and was affected by, this turn in world history.

A2—September 13 *The Apocalyptic World of Christopher Columbus*

READING: Delaney, *Columbus & the Quest for Jerusalem*, Intro + chs 1-2

Sept 14 **SUBMIT PAPER #1:** In 500 words, trace the contours of your own religious/spiritual/philosophical story to date. Is it marked more by radical change or general continuity—or something in between? Is it a series of peak moments or steady flow—or both? What do think are the important frontiers of decision or movement that lie ahead for you? This paper will serve as a ‘base-line’ for comparison in the final paper of the course.

Gdansk, Poland — September 15-20**A3—September 21** *Columbus’s First Voyage: Paradise Found?*

READING: Delaney, *Columbus & the Quest for Jerusalem*, chs 3, 5

A4—September 23 *Columbus: Reversals, Shame, and Recovery*

READING: Delaney, *Columbus & the Quest for Jerusalem*, chs 6, 8-9

A5—September 25 *Columbus: Legacy and Evaluation*

READING: Delaney, *Columbus & the Quest for Jerusalem*, chs 10-11 + Afterword

Lisbon, Portugal — September 26-28**Cadiz, Spain — September 29 – October 1****A6—October 3** *Conversos and Exiles*

READING: Birnbaum, *Long Journey of Gracia Mendes*, Intro + chs 1-4

A7—October 5 *Sheltered by Muslims, Helping Jews*
READING: Birnbaum, *Long Journey of Gracia Mendes*, Intro + chs 6-7

Dubrovnik, Croatia — October 6-10

PART II

The two lives taken from the African segment of our voyage seem to offer a stark contrast. Fatima Mernissi recounts a childhood passed within the confines of a Moroccan harem, while Olaudah Equiano tells a story of radical dislocation—being kidnapped, enslaved, transported across the Atlantic Ocean, sold from one owner to another until he achieves freedom only to enter upon endless, and restless, commercial voyaging of his own. The two are alike, however, in relentlessly questioning their condition, their companions, and their fate. Both find that destiny to be a move from confinement to true liberty: Equiano in evangelical Christianity and abolitionism; Mernissi in recovery of Islam's message of women's dignity and empowerment.

A8—October 12 *Sorting out Men—and Women*
READING: Mernissi, *Dreams of Trepass*, chs 1-8

SUBMIT PAPER #2 A comparative critical analysis of the substance and role that religion played in the lives of Christopher Columbus and Gracia Mendes as discussed in the readings and class sessions of PART I. 1200 words

A9—October 14 *The Freedom of the Harem?*
READING: Mernissi, *Dreams of Trepass*, chs 9-16

Casablanca, Morocco — October 15-20

A10—October 22 *Opening to the Rest of the World*
READING: Mernissi, *Dreams of Trepass*, chs 17-22

No Classes — October 24

A11—October 25 **FIELD CLASS PAPERS DUE – PRESENTATIONS**

A12—October 27 **FIELD CLASS PRESENTATIONS**

Tema, Ghana — October 28-30
Takoradi, Ghana — October 31 – November 1

A13—November 3 *From Paradise to Hell*
READING: Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, chs 1-4

A14—November 6 *The Purgatory of Slavery—and of Freedom*
READING: Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, chs 5-8

No Classes — November 6

A15—November 8 *Spiritual Quest and True Vocation*

READING: Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, chs 9-12

Salvador, Brazil — November 10-15

PART III

Two lives taken from the Western Hemisphere offer an instructive contrast between intended and unintended pilgrimage. As we skirt South America, where Roman Catholicism long played an important role in upholding empire and hierarchy, we will consider the life of Oscar Romero whose dedication as a Catholic priest moved him from his originally conservative convictions to radical testimony against the oppressive ruling regime in El Salvador. That move resulted in his assassination—but also, last year, in his elevation to sainthood by the Vatican. By contrast, Emily Raboteau, reared in comfortable academic circumstances in Princeton, was driven to visit various “Zions” which different religions have envisioned. That quest took her to several of the places we have passed on our voyage; it also took her into the depths of her own family’s conflicted past and to new self-discovery. Her book will thus serve as a good prompt for our own reflections at journey’s end.

A16—November 16 *Conservative Context*

READING: Clarke, Oscar Romero, Intro + chs 1-2

A17—November 18 *Pastoral Challenge*

READING: Clarke, Oscar Romero, chs 3-5

SUBMIT PAPER #3 A comparative critical analysis of the autobiographies of Mernissi and Equiano given the agenda established for PART II of the course. 1200 words

A18—November 20 *Prophetic Witness*

READING: Clarke, Oscar Romero, chs 6-8 + Conclusion

No Class — November 21

A19—November 23 *Israel: Africans in the Original Zion*

READING: Raboteau, *Searching for Zion*, Part I

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago — November 24

A20—November 26 *Jamaica: Rastafarian Yearning in ‘Babylon’*

READING: Raboteau, *Searching for Zion*, Part II

A21—November 28 *Ethiopia: Rastafarian Utopia or Delusion?*

READING: Raboteau, *Searching for Zion*, Part III

No class – November 29

A22–December 1 *Ghana: Revisiting African-American Origins*
READING: Raboteau, *Searching for Zion*, Part IV

Guayaquil, Ecuador – December 2-7

A23–December 9 *Sweet Land of Liberty? The American South*
READING: Raboteau, *Searching for Zion*, Part V

Puntarenas, Costa Rica – December 11-15

A24–December 16 *Discuss Final Papers*

A25–December 19 **SUBMIT PAPER #4** Summarize the contours, changing moods, and conclusions of Emily Raboteau's journeys, and discuss how they compare to your own as tracked in your journal and now, upon your final reflections on the Fall 19 voyage of Semester at Sea. 1200 words

Arrive San Diego, California – December 23

FIELD WORK

Semester at Sea field experiences allow for an unparalleled opportunity to compare, contrast, and synthesize the different cultures and countries encountered over the course of the voyage. In addition to the one field class, students will complete independent field assignments that span multiple countries.

Field Class & Assignment

The field class for this course is on **October 1 in Cadiz, Spain**.

Field Class attendance is mandatory for all students enrolled in this course. Do not book individual travel plans or a Semester at Sea sponsored trip on the day of your field class. Field Classes constitute at least 20% of the contact hours for each course, and are developed and led by the instructor.

Field Class: The Trail of Columbus

Port: Cadiz, Spain

Date: DAY 3 - Tuesday, 1 October

The class will explore three sites in Seville—the monumental Cathedral, the Alcazar palace complex, and the General Archive of the Indies—to grasp the role played by religion in shaping Christopher Columbus's ideas, ambitions, and legacy.

Learning objectives: We will seek to better understand:

1. the coexistence and contentions between Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in Spain in the Reconquista context of Columbus's voyages.
2. the role of religion in the hopes and ambitions Columbus harbored for his voyages and the impact these had upon religion both in the new world and the old.
3. the ways that religious meaning and significance can be gleaned from architecture and artifacts, along with documents.

Assignment

Students will collaborate in small teams to create a project that critically reflects on the three sites visited during the Field Class in Seville. The projects are due on A11/October 25 and will be presented in class at that or the following class session.

- Format/genre: the project may take the form of a traditional academic paper, presented in class with projected illustrations, or it may incorporate more visual and/or aural elements as a photographic/sonographic essay. (Please attend to strictures on pg. 1 regarding subjects' consent in this process.)
- Aim: Since everyone in class will have visited the same sites, your goal in this project is not to introduce but to interpret the latter, aiming for a deeper level of analysis. Think of moving from *sight* to *insight*. In particular, your project should interact with what we have read and learned from Delaney's *Columbus & the Quest for Jerusalem*. Bottom line: what new light can your project shed on our reading, discussions, and on-site experiences?

If your project follows the usual paper format, it should be at least 1500 words in length. If it is of another genre, it needs to get the equivalent work done with no less clarity and strength of argument. This assignment, including attentive participation in the site-visits themselves, will count for 25% of your final grade.

Independent Field Assignments

Students are strongly urged to keep a **journal** detailing and reflecting on their on-shore experiences at our various ports of call. As an aid to memory and a record of your own "pilgrim's progress," this material will add precision and depth to the personal assessment required in the final course paper. Ideally, journal entries should comment on how first-hand impressions compare to the learning and expectations gleaned from the course reading done prior to arrival at that port/country. How did the on-shore experience confirm, deepen, or correct what was imparted by the book? And how did it contribute to your ongoing reflections about your own religious/spiritual/philosophical outlook?

METHODS OF EVALUATION

1. Class participation: regular attendance; informed contributions to class discussion. 15%
2. Paper #1, due September 14 (after A2): autobiographical reflection. 10%
3. Papers #2, 3, and 4: due October 12 (A8), November 18 (A17), and December 19 (A25), respectively. Comparative analysis of assigned readings and class discussion. Papers #2 & 3: 15% each; Paper 4: 20%.

4. Field class project & presentation: October 25 (A11); 25%.

GRADING SCALE

The following Grading Scale is utilized for student evaluation. Pass/Fail is not an option for Semester at Sea coursework. Note that C-, D+ and D- grades are also not assigned on Semester at Sea in accordance with the grading system at Colorado State University (the SAS partner institution).

Pluses and minuses are awarded as follows on a 100% scale:

<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Satisfactory/Poor</u>	<u>Failing</u>
97-100%: A+	87-89%: B+	77-79%: C+	Less than 60%: F
93-96%: A	83-86%: B	70-76%: C	
90-92%: A-	80-82%: B-	60-69%: D	

ATTENDANCE/ENGAGEMENT IN THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Attendance in all Semester at Sea classes, including the Field Class, is mandatory. Informed contributions to class discussion based on having read and reflected on the day's assigned reading is vital to the success of this course and to the student's learning. Student performance on this score will count for 15% of the final grade. Students must inform the instructor prior to any unanticipated absence and take the initiative to make up missed work in a timely fashion. The instructor will make reasonable efforts to enable students to make up work which must be accomplished under the instructor's supervision as relevant. In the event of a conflict in regard to this policy, individuals may appeal using established CSU procedures.

LEARNING ACCOMMODATIONS

Semester at Sea® provides academic accommodations for students with diagnosed learning disabilities, in accordance with ADA guidelines. Students who will need accommodations in a class, should contact ISE to discuss their individual needs. Any accommodation must be discussed in a timely manner prior to implementation.

A letter from students' home institutions verifying the accommodations received on their home campuses (dated within the last three years) is required before any accommodation is provided on the ship. Students must submit verification of accommodations to academic@isevoyages.org as soon as possible, but no later than two months prior to the voyage. More details can be found within the Course Registration Packet, as posted to the [Courses and Field Classes page](#) no later than one month prior to registration.

STUDENT CONDUCT CODE

The foundation of a university is truth and knowledge, each of which relies in a fundamental manner upon academic integrity and is diminished significantly by academic misconduct. Academic integrity is conceptualized as doing and taking credit for one's own work. A pervasive attitude promoting academic integrity enhances the sense of community and adds value to the educational process. All within the University are affected by the cooperative commitment to academic integrity. All Semester at Sea courses adhere to this Academic Integrity Policy and Student Conduct Code.

Depending on the nature of the assignment or exam, the faculty member may require a written declaration of the following honor pledge: "I have not given, received, or used any unauthorized assistance on this exam/assignment."

RESERVE BOOKS FOR THE LIBRARY

AUTHOR: Fatima Mernissi

TITLE: *The Veil and The Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*

PUBLISHER: Basic Books

ISBN #: 978-0201632217

DATE/EDITION: 1991

FILM REQUEST

Title of Film: "Marley" (Kevin MacDonald, director; 2012)

Distributor: Magnolia Pictures

Title of Film: "Romero" (John Duigan, director, 1989)

Distributor: Paulist Pictures/Warner Brothers

ELECTRONIC COURSE MATERIALS

None

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

None