

# Artists' Books/Sacred Texts

RELST 328

Instructor: Prof. S Brent Rodriguez Plate (just "Prof Plate" for short)

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Office hours: 11.00-11.50am Mon/Wed, or by appt. Room 108 Benedict Hall

## **Course Objectives and Goals:**

This course looks at the ways books have been used in creative ways in the western religious traditions. This includes artistic books, illustrated manuscripts, and varieties of Bibles, Qurans, Torahs, and other sacred scriptures. We will examine a history of "The Book," including technological developments in printing and bookbinding, and how these artistic aspects influence beliefs and practices. The course will include projects in which students will create their own books.

## **Course Materials:**

Students will need to purchase the following books, available in the bookstore:

- Nicole Howard, *The Book: The Life Story of a Technology*
- Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History*
- Linda Woodhead, *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction*
- Norman Solomon, *Judaism: A Very Short Introduction 2nd edition*
- Other texts will be made available online through Blackboard (BB)

## **Course Requirements and Grade Distribution:**

**Presence:** (20% of the final grade)

This grade includes attendance and participation, but entails a more general sense of bringing both body and mind to the classroom for discussions. There are readings or other assignments for every day of class (listed below) and you are required to have read *before* class, and to be prepared to discuss the readings. "Presence" means not coming to class and asking what you were *supposed* to have read; "presence" means listening to the others in the classroom; "presence" means not checking your watch every 10 minutes; "presence" means, to use the title of a great religious film, "being there."

This course is small and therefore relies on informed comments by students on a regular basis. The grade for presence includes attendance (see below). The grade also entails that students have read assigned readings *before* class, and come prepared to discuss the readings. You will be graded

on your ability to analyze and synthesize assignments; on the frequency, relevance and insights of your comments; and on your ability to present your ideas coherently to the class. Presence grades will be calculated from: 1) my own notes from class sessions, in which I note who was significantly involved in discussion, 2) your own self-assessment of your contributions to class discussion. Assessment will occur twice during the semester.

Finally: You are expected to treat this classroom as if you were on an airline flight: That is, all electronic devices must be turned off and safely stowed away for the duration of our flights. Cell phones will not be tolerated in this classroom, and laptops are not allowed. A ringing phone during class will result in that student being marked absent for the day.

## **Weekly writings: Two Questions, One Comment (2Q-1C):** (20%)

Every Monday, students will bring in two questions about the assigned readings/viewings for the coming day/week. These will be printed out, and will serve as discussion starters for Monday and Wednesday classes. Then, every Wednesday, students are to bring one solid paragraph of ~150 words, printed out, that is a response to one key point that was brought up in the discussions for the week.

## **Written Assignments:** (30%)

There will be two papers due during this term. Each will be an examination of a particular book (from our library or elsewhere), noting its performative, iconic, and aesthetic dimensions. More on this in class.

## **Presentations:** (10% each)

Each written assignment will be accompanied by an oral presentation.

## **Final Project:** (20%)

To be discussed and developed in class. Basically the idea is to create our own "sacred, artistic books," from papermaking, to printing or writing, to binding.

## **Statement on Disabilities**

Prof Plate will work with any students with disabilities as need be. Students should contact Prof Plate **in the first two weeks of class** to discuss any specific needs, and should have already spoken with Dean Harrison ([aharriso@hamilton.edu](mailto:aharriso@hamilton.edu)) about this. If in question, feel free to contact Prof Plate.

## Course Schedule

(All events subject to change)

21 Jan	Introductions
	<b>Books, Bibliothèques, and Bibles</b>
26 Jan	Readings for week, Nicole Howard, <i>The Book</i>
28 Jan	Nicole Howard, <i>The Book</i> Special collections in library
	<b>Sacred Scripts and Scriptures</b>
2 Feb	Readings: Jim Watts, "3-Dimensions of Scriptures"
4 Feb	Jim Watts, "3-Dimensions of Scriptures"
	<b>The "Peoples of the Book"</b>
9 Feb	Reading: Solomon, <i>Judaism</i>
11 Feb	Solomon, <i>Judaism</i>
16 Feb	Readings from the Tanakh 4pm REQUIRED attendance: Richard Newton, "The African American Bible" KJ 102.
18 Feb	Readings from the Tanakh
23 Feb	Readings: Woodhead, <i>Christianity</i>
25 Feb	Woodhead, <i>Christianity</i>
2 Mar	Readings from New Testament
4 Mar	Readings from New Testament 4pm REQUIRED attendance: Anne Clark, "Medieval Prayer Books" KJ 102.
9 Mar	No regular class – individual meetings w/ students
11 Mar	No regular class – individual meetings w/ students
13 Mar	<b>First paper due</b>
16-27 Mar	<b>Spring Break</b>
30 Mar	Readings: Armstrong, <i>Islam</i>
1 Apr	Armstrong, <i>Islam</i>
6 Apr	Readings from the Quran

8 Apr	Readings from the Quran
11 Apr	<b>Day Trip to Mass MoCA, Exhibit: Bibliothecaphilia</b>
13 Apr	<b>Student Presentations on paper #1</b>
15 Apr	<b>Student Presentations on paper #1</b>
	<b>The remainder of the course will be spent in the library and the Wellin, looking at, touching, discussing the artistry of books</b>
	<b>All courses and materials and locations TBA</b>
20 Apr	
22 Apr	
27 Apr	
29 Apr	
4 May	
6 May	<b>Student Presentations on Paper #2</b>
11 May	<b>Student Presentations on Paper #2</b>
17 May	<b>Final draft of Paper #2 due.</b>