



Religious Conversions

EUH 3931; JST 4936; REL 4936

EUH 5934; RLG 5696

Spring 2016; Tu 8-9 (3:00-3:50; 4:05-4:55) / Th 9 (4:05-4:55); Keene-Flint 111

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Course Description

For untold centuries, religion was not a matter of personal choice. One simply inherited the gods, beliefs, and rituals of one's ancestors, absorbing them along with one's mother tongue. It was arguably in ancient Israel that the concept of a religious conversion first became thinkable, thanks to that event which is generally if imprecisely known as the monotheistic revolution. For as soon as there is one true God, true forms of worship, etc. – and thus also false ones – a radical shift takes place, what Foucault would refer to as a discursive break. It is against this backdrop that one can clearly discern the significance of conversion. It will be the central goal of this interdisciplinary seminar to examine the conceptualization, representation, narration, and reception of converts and conversion in Judaism and Christianity, from the biblical period through modernity, using methodologies employed in the study of history, religion, psychology, anthropology, and literature. Students will thus acquire intellectual tools for interpreting and analyzing the discourse and

experience of religious conversion, topics of continued relevance in the 21st century. In order to supplement students' traditional classroom experience, we are organizing a workshop on the theme of conversion, involving both visiting scholars and UF faculty, which students will be expected to attend in lieu of that day's class.

Written assignments : Academic writing demands that you make your arguments in a clear and precise manner and that you back them up with evidence. Thus, written assignments will be graded on the basis of **style as well as content**. Completion of the written assignments is *absolutely required* . Late assignments **will not** be accepted without penalty. Please make every effort to apprise the instructor of adverse circumstances that affect your ability to attend class or complete assignments on time. Official documentation is required to excuse an absence and to schedule make-up assignments. Unless otherwise noted, assignments will be collected at the end of the precept session for which they are assigned. Do not submit your work to via email – written work must be presented in hard-copy.

Attendance: Students are expected to attend class regularly and arrive for lecture promptly. A penalty will be imposed on students who arrive late for class. Attendance is mandatory. Unexcused absences will be penalized in the following manner: you will be permitted three absences over the course of the term; every absence thereafter will lower your grade by one third. Absences will be excused if students provide proper documentation.

Conduct PLAGIARISM and will not accepted in this class because it violates the University of Florida's honesty policy. Please review the policy at <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/>.

Please do not hesitate to contact the instructor during the semester if you have any individual concerns or issues that need to be discussed. Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drp/>). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation.

Please turn off your cell phones. If your cell phone rings or if you spend your time texting, you will be asked to leave the class and this will count as an unexcused absence.

Online Course Evaluation Process: Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>.

Suggested books:

There are no required books for this course. As much as possible, secondary readings, course materials, and other information will be made available through **Canvas** at e-Learning Support Services: <http://elearning.ufl.edu>. Readings for each week can be found through the 'files' link.

The following books are recommended, especially for the graduate students.

Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

Karl F. Morrison, *Understanding Conversion*

Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief*

Course Requirements:

Attendance is mandatory

Participation — 10%

2 Papers — 45%

2 Exams — 45%

Make-up exams must be approved by instructor beforehand, or justified afterward by providing appropriate documentation (medical, etc.).

Grade scale:

87–89 = B+	77–79 = C+	67–69 = D+	below 60 = E
93–100 = A	83–86 = B	73–76 = C	63–66 = D
90–92 = A-	80–82 = B-	70–72 = C-	60–62 = D

Schedule: (Assignments listed in **GREEN** can be found in the 'files' file in Canvas.

Week 1

1/5 **Preliminaries:** Thomas Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chapters 4, 9, and 10; Marc David Baer, "History and Religious Conversion" in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis Rambo and Charles Farhadian (Oxford, 2014) 25-47:

https://books.google.com/books?id=UEzgAgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q=baer&f=false .

1/7 **Preliminaries:** William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, lectures 9 and 10

Week 2

1/12 **Hebrew Bible:** Genesis 12-37; Exodus 1-14, 19-20, 24; Kawashima "Covenant and Contingence"

1/14 **Hebrew Bible:** Genesis 17; Exodus 31; Leviticus 18, 20; Deuteronomy 1-17; Karl Morrison, *Understanding Conversion* selections

Week 3

1/19 **Hebrew Bible:** Ruth; Ezra-Nehemiah

1/21 **New Testament:** Matthew; Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in*

Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo, Chapters 1, 2, 12, and 14:

<https://archive.org/stream/Nock1933Conversion/Nock%201933%20Conversion#page/n0/mode/2up>

Week 4

1/26 **New Testament:** Acts of the Apostles; Alan Segal, *Paul the Convert*, excerpts

1/28 **New Testament:** 1 Thessalonians; Paula Fredriksen, "Paul and Augustine: Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions, and the Retrospective Self," *Journal of Theological Studies* 37, no. 1 (1986): 4–34

Week 5

2/2 **Augustine:** Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, chapters 1, 2, 5, and 10; Morrison, "Augustine of Hippo's *Confessions*"

2/4 **Augustine:** Morrison, "Augustine of Hippo's *Confessions*"

Week 6

2/9 **Islam & Iberia:** Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative*, selections

2/11 **Islam & Iberia:** Adnan A. Husain, "Conversion to History: Negating Exile and Messianism in Al-Samaw'al Al-Maghribi's Polemic against Judaism," *Medieval Encounters* 8, no. 1 (March 2002): 34.

Week 7

2/16 **Alfonsi:** *Disputatio contra judeos*, selections

2/18 **Abelard:** *Historia Calamitatum*

<http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/abelard-histcal.asp>

Week 8

2/23 **Hermannus:** Hermannus quondam iudaeos, *Opusculum de conversione sua*

2/25 **EXAM 1:** (1/5-2/23)

Week 9

SPRING BREAK

Week 10

3/8 **Crusades:** Malkiel and crusade accounts

3/10 **Public Lecture:** Rachel Furst

Week 11

3/15 **Conversos:** Ryan Szpiech, Melamed, Inquisition texts

3/17 **Conversos:** Inquisition documents

Week 12

3/22 **Luther:** Luther, "The Ninety-five Theses"; Roland Bainton, *Here I*

Stand, excerpts; Brad Gregory, "'To the point of shedding your blood': The Bible, Communities of Faith, and Martyrs' Resistance to Conversion in the Reformation Era" in *Conversion: Old and New Worlds* ed. Kenneth Mills and Anthony Grafton (University of Rochester Press, 2003), 66-86.

3/24 **Emancipation and Conversion:** Todd Endelman, "Conversion in the Age of Emancipation", Rahel Varnhagen; Hannah Arendt on Varnhagen

Week 13

3/29 **Conversions Workshop:** Gauri Viswanathan, "Literacy in the Eye of India's Conversion Storm"; John Woolman, *Journal*,
<http://www.strecorsoc.org/jwoolman/w09.html>

3/31 **Workshop:** follow-up discussion

Week 14

4/5 **Cartesian Doubt:** Descartes, *Meditations*

4/7 **Philosophy:** Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, excerpts;

Week 15

4/12 **Politics:** Trotsky,

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/mylife/1930-lif.pdf>

4/14 **Politics:** Malcolm X, http://www.malcolm-x.org/docs/let_mecca.htm

Week 16

4/19 **EXAM 2:** (3/8-4/14)