Religiosity in the Middle East and the U.S.

OSHER 517-001
Dates: Tuesdays, 4/1/14 – 5/6/14
Times: 3:15 – 4:45 PM
Location: Commander's House, Fort Douglas
Instructor: Dr. Ewa Wasilewska, Associate Professor/Lecturer, Dept. of Anthropology and the Middle East Center, mruczek@aol.com, www.ewas.us

Course Overview
This course will examine origin and meaning of two important concepts, “religion” and “religiosity,” and the affects their understanding, or lack of thereof, have on modern populations of the U.S.A. and the Middle East. It will discuss specific historical, economic, and political settings such as the emergence of monotheism, nationalism, terrorism, etc., in which these two concepts have been interchangeably used (or abused) for the real or perceived benefit of involved parties and for shaping their identities. Consequently, this course will introduce students to issues of religious diversity as perceived, practiced, and prescribed under rules of different religions within specific political, social, and cultural systems of these two regions. The stress will be put on mutual perceptions of the groups discussed (e.g., Jews, Christians, and Muslims) as insiders and/or outsiders of these systems. The course will provide students with a better understanding of present relations between the above religions, regions, and their representatives.

Disclaimer:
Some of the writings, lectures, films, or presentations in this course may include material that conflicts with the core beliefs of some students. Please review the syllabus carefully to see if the course is one that you are committed to taking.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF TOPICS
WEEK #1:
General remarks regarding the Middle East as a region. “Clash of civilizations?” – Christian West vs Islamic Middle East?
Religion, religiosity and identity. Secularization or “religionisation?” – same trend, different approaches?

WEEK #2:
Religion as a modern concept. Monotheism and its foundations. Biblical authors and the Qur’anic revelations. Does religionsubjuge women?

WEEK #3:
Birth of martyrdom: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.
WEEK #4:
In the name of One and Only: Crusades and Jihad. Orientalism and Occidentalism. Mythology of the Homeland.

WEEK #5:
Searching for identity: a case for unity or disparity?

WEEK #6:
In the name of freedom: fighting for God to live in heaven or…? Fundamentalism. Can we all get along?

SUGGESTED READINGS:


Covarrubias, J. and T. Lansford, Eds.: *Strategic Interests in the Middle East. Opposition and Support for US Foreign Policy.* Ashgate. 2007.


Religious Tolerance.org – Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance. This website is a very interesting and informative source on different religions focusing on Christianity as a dominant ideology in North America with extensive references to Judaism and Islam. It is truly an Internet phenomenon that offers a mixture of popular and scientific views on the topic (numerous links and references) including corrections to statements made as well as public reactions (both positive and negative). The creators of this website represent a so-called middle class of North America, reflecting moderate views of most Americans as promoting “the concept of ‘liberty and justice for all.’”

To get acquainted with this website, its creators, their goals, etc., see: http://www.religioustolerance.org/aboutus.htm

To be introduced to different religions that are focus in this class see:

**Christianity:** [http://www.religioustolerance.org/christ.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/christ.htm) that starts with an interesting quote:
"Christianity started out in Palestine as a fellowship; it moved to Greece and became a philosophy; it moved to Italy and became an institution; it moved to Europe and became a culture; it came to America and became an enterprise." Sam Pascoe.

**Judaism:** [http://www.religioustolerance.org/judaism.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/judaism.htm) that starts with factual information that is often overlooked by people of others faiths who believe in the so-called “Jewish conspiracy.” “Although Jews comprise only about 0.2% of the human race, Jewish influence on the world has been vast -- far more than their numbers would indicate.”

**Islam:** [http://www.religioustolerance.org/islam.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/islam.htm) that starts with the statements from the Qu’ran and hadiths focusing on peace. The last quotation is the one that we all have to remember: "Jim Jones, David Koresh and Meir Kahane do not typify Christianity and Judaism in the eyes of the civilized West, but those same eyes are prone to see Osama bin Laden and Mullah Muhammad Omar as typifying Islam," Richard Bulliet.