PRS Jewish Theology Course Outline

Welcome to our course on Jewish Theology. This course is designed to shed light on the depth and diversity of Jewish thought across the centuries, introducing students to the fundamental concepts, debates, and perspectives that have shaped Jewish religion and ethos. From the oneness of God to the laws and ethics instilled in the Torah, from the progressive interpretations of Reform Judaism to the strict observance of Orthodox Judaism, we will navigate the rich panorama of Jewish theological thinking. We will also explore pivotal concepts like Covenant, Chosenness, and Messianism and grapple with issues concerning free will, divine providence, and life after death. By diving into sacred texts, philosophical writings, and modern scholarly discourses, this course give give us a better understanding of the complicated world of Jewish theology.

Week 1: Introduction to Jewish Theology

- **Read: "What are the Origins of the Oral Torah?"**
- **Come with prepared with written answers to these "Thought Questions"**:
    - How does Jewish theology distinguish itself from other monotheistic theologies?
    - What are the implications of defining theology within a Jewish context?

Week 2: Jewish Conception of God

- **Read: Maimonides, "Guide for the Perplexed", various selections.**
    - Part I, Chapters 1-5: Basic principles about God's existence and nature.
- **Read: Kaplan, Mordecai M. "Judaism as a Civilization."**
    - Chapter 4: "The Modern Ideology"
- **Come with prepared with written answers to these "Thought Questions"**:
    - In what ways does the incorporeality of God affect Jewish ritual and belief?
    - How do the 13 principles of faith by Maimonides shape the modern understanding of God in Judaism?

Week 3: Covenant Theology

- **Read: Heschel, Abraham Joshua. "God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism."**
    - Chapter 6: ""The Enigma is Not Solved"
- **Come with prepared with written answers to these "Thought Questions"**:
    - How does the concept of covenant shape the Jewish understanding of law and ethics?

- In what ways does the idea of a chosen people influence the Jewish view of interfaith relations?

Week 4: Jewish Understandings of Torah

- **Read: "The Midrash in Judaism."**
  - Introduction: Gives an overarching understanding of how Midrash functions within Jewish interpretative traditions.
- **Read: Fishbane, Michael. "Jewish Interpretation of the Bible: Ancient and Contemporary."**
  - Part 3: "Rabbinic Biblical Interpretation—Midrash"
- **Read: Judaism and Scripture: The Evidence of Leviticus Rabbah by Jacob Neusner**
- **Come with prepared with written answers to these "Thought Questions"**:
  - How has the dual concept of Written and Oral Torah impacted the development of Jewish legal and ethical systems?
  - What are the modern challenges to traditional interpretations of Torah in light of archeological and historical studies?

Week 5: Eschatology and Messianic Thought in Judaism

- **Read:, Gershom Scholem. "The Messianic Idea in Judaism."**
  - Chapter 3: "The Crisis of Tradition in Jewish Messianism"
- **Come with prepared with written answers to these "Thought Questions"**:
  - What role does Messianic hope play in contemporary Jewish life and thought?
  - How do different Jewish denominations reconcile the idea of a personal vs. symbolic Messiah?

Week 6: "Choseness"

- Watch: Meir Soloveichik and Shai Held on "Does God Love the Jews?"
- **Come with prepared with written answers to these "Thought Questions"**:
  - How does Jewish Chosenness interact with the concept of Zionism and the existence of Israel?
  - What role does the concept of "Chosenness" play in contemporary Jewish theology and discourse?

Week 7: Jewish Thought on Suffering and Evil

- **Read: Kushner, Harold S. "When Bad Things Happen to Good People."**
    - Chapters 1-3: Foundations of Kushner's argument on suffering and God's role.
- **Read: Roth, John K. "The Failure of Ethics: Confronting the Holocaust, Genocide, and Other Mass Atrocities."**
    - Chapter 7 The Effects of Genocide
- **Come with prepared with written answers to these "Thought Questions"**:
    - How have Jewish responses to the problem of evil evolved, particularly post-Holocaust?
    - Is theodicy a viable concept within Judaism when addressing issues like suffering and human-induced evil?

Week 8: Contemporary Jewish Theologies

- **Read: Plaskow, Judith. "Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective."**
    - Chapter 2 Torah: Reshaping Jewish Memory
- **Read: Hartman, Donniel. "Putting God Second: How to Save Religion from Itself."**
    - Chapter 6 Do I Have to Believe in God to Be a Good Jew?
- **Come with prepared with written answers to these "Thought Questions"**:
    - What are the theological implications of the establishment of the State of Israel from a religious perspective?
    - How can feminist and liberation theologies be reconciled with traditional Jewish thought?

Week 9: Review and Reflection

- **Read: Green, Arthur. "Judaism's Ten Best Ideas: A Brief Guide for Seekers."**
    - Chapter 2
- **Come with prepared with written answers to these "Thought Questions"**:
    - Reflecting on the course, which aspects of Jewish theology do you find most compelling, and why?

- How will the study of Jewish theology influence your future academic or professional pursuits?