

Semester at Sea, Course Syllabus

Colorado State University, Academic Partner

<b>Semester:</b>	<b>Fall 2016</b>
<b>Discipline:</b>	<b>Philosophy/Religion</b>
<b>Course Number and Title:</b>	<b>PHIL 372 Meaning and Truth in Religion</b>
<b>Course Level:</b>	<b>Upper (300-499)</b>
<b>Faculty Name:</b>	<b>Dr. Yael Avrahami</b>
<b>Semester Credit Hours:</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Prerequisites:</b>	A lower-division religion or philosophy course

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The purpose of this course is to question the ability of words to reveal truth about the divine. In other words, it discusses the question of religious language. The course will open with an attempt to define monotheism and the related notions of the incorporeal, infinite, and transcendent god. The second part will include readings from the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Quran that will demonstrate the gap between the common definition of monotheism and these texts. The subject of pre-Socratic monotheistic theology and the lack of its cultic manifestation will also be presented.

The third part of the course will look at the principles of faith or doctrines of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Four medieval attempts to solve the disagreement between these principles and scripture will be reviewed: *via negativa* (Maimonides), univocal language (Duns Scotus), Analogy (Thomas Aquinas), and spiritual practice (Al-Ghazali). The fourth part of the course will investigate modern replies to the problem of religious language. Particular attention will be paid to the symbolic and mythic approaches, as well as to the emergence of hermeneutics.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

**By the end of this course, students will be able to:**

1. Outline the main problems and solutions of religious language
2. Compare and contrast the various understandings of monotheism
3. Critically examine the problem of religious language
4. Write about their field experience using terms and theories taught in the classroom and in the course readings.
5. Discuss diverse religious ideas and practices in an emphatic-objective way.

### **REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS**

**AUTHOR:** Karen Armstrong

**TITLE:** A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam

**PUBLISHER:** Ballantine Books

**ISBN #:** 0345384563

**DATE/EDITION:** August 9, 1994

### **TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE**

Depart Hamburg—September 10
<p><b>A1—September 12: Introduction</b></p> <p><u>Topics:</u>  What is monotheism  How to speak about God</p>
<p><b>A2—September 14: the basics of God in Judaism</b></p> <p><u>Topics:</u>  Jewish principles of faith  The link between thought and practice in Judaism</p> <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A. Altmann, “Article of Faith: Maimonides” (Vol2, pp. 529-530) in: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i><sup>2</sup> (Ed. M. Berenbaum and F. Skolnik), Macmillan Reference, 2007</li> <li>• Bible: Exod 20; Isa. 40-45.</li> </ul>
No Classes—September 16
<p><b>A3—September 17: the basics of God in Islam</b></p> <p><u>Topics:</u>  Tawhid  The five pillars of Islam  The link between thought and practice in Islam</p> <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A. A. B. Philips, “The Categories of Tawhid”, in: <i>The Fundamentals of Tawheed (Islamic Monotheism)</i>, 2005, pp. 17-42.</li> <li>• Quran: Surah #1</li> </ul>
Piraeus—September 19-23
<p><b>A4—September 24: the basics of God in Christianity</b></p> <p><u>Topics:</u>  Dogma  The Trinity  The link between thought and practice in Christianity</p> <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• St. John of Damascus, chapter 2, 4 “<a href="#">An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith</a>” (pp. 166-168, 170-172)</li> </ul>
Civitavecchia - September 26-28 Field Class, Monday, September 26 Livorno – September 29-30
<p><b>A5—October 1: The History of Monotheism – Ancient Israel</b></p> <p><u>Topics:</u>  Israelite religion</p> <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “In the Beginning”, pp. 3-33 in <i>textbook</i>.</li> </ul>
Barcelona—October 3-7 3 Oct is <i>Muharam</i> (Islam) and <i>Rosh Hashana</i> (Judaism)

**A6—October 8: The History of Monotheism – Exile and 2<sup>nd</sup> temple Judaism**

Topics:

From cultic to conceptual monotheism  
The birth of Rabbinic Judaism  
universalism

Readings:

- “One God”, pp. 40-79 in *Textbook*
- Optional: Mark Smith, “Monotheism and the Redefinition of Divinity in Ancient Israel” *JISMOR* 9, pp.3-19

Casablanca—October 10-14  
Oct12 is *Yom Kippur* (Jewish)

**A7—October 15: The History of Monotheism - Zoroastrianism**

Topics:

Dualism and monotheism  
The problem of evil

Readings:

- “The Teachings of Zoroastrianism” (pp. 91-96, 102-103) in: *Invitation to Western Religion*.
- Optional: J.M Boy and A. Donald, “Is Zoroastrianism Dualistic or Monotheistic?” *JAAR* 67/4 (1980), “pp. 557-588.

Assignment:

Field Class Essay due

**A8—October 17: The History of Monotheism – Greek Philosophy**

Topics:

Philosophical monotheism  
Xenophanes  
Plato

Readings:

- L.C. Schneider, “End of the Many: the Roots of Monotheism in Greek Philosophy” (pp. 39-52) in: *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity*, Routledge, 2008.
- Plato, “[the Allegory of the Cave](#)” *The Republic VII*.

**A9—October 19: The History of Monotheism – Islam**

Topics:

Islam as the meeting point of cultic and philosophical monotheism

Readings:

- “Unity: the God of Islam”, pp. 132-169 in *textbook*

Dakar—October 21-24  
Special ceremony each Sunday 10:00AM at *Keur Moussa* Monastery

**A10—October 25: The History of Monotheism – Christianity**

Topics:

The trinity and its challenge to philosophical monotheism

Readings:

- “Trinity: the Christian God”, pp. 107-131 in *Textbook*

**A11—October 27: Monotheism and Gender**

Topics:

The loss of the goddess in monotheism  
The problem of a male God  
Jewish and Christian responses to the problem of the male God

Readings:

- Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, “the divine phallus and the dilemma of masculinity”, in *God's Phallus: And Other Problems for Men and Monotheism*, Beacon Press, 1995, pp. 1-12.
- “[The Christian Goddess](#)”, in: Esoteric Theological Seminary Website.

No Classes—October 28

**A12—October 30:**

Assignment:

Midterm Exam – The Birth and History of Monotheism

Salvador—November 1-6

Nov 2 is *Dia de Finados* (Christianity), Public Holiday

**A13—November 7: The Problem of Religious Language**

Topics:

Main problems and questions raised by monotheistic believe

Readings:

- H. Richard Niebuhr, “Faith in God and Gods” in *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture: With Supplementary Essays*, Westminster, 1993, pp. 114-126

**A14—November 9: Abrahamic Monotheism as a Philosophical inquiry**

Topics:

Divine simplicity  
Muslim, Jewish, and Christian philosophy of the middle ages

Readings:

- “the God of the Philosophers”, pp. 170-209, in *Textbook*

**A15—November 11: Solutions: Analogy and Univocal Language**

Topics:

Thomas Aquinas  
Duns Scotus  
Anthropomorphism  
Equivocation, univocation and analogy

Readings:

Excerpts from: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*  
M.B. Ingham and M. Dreyer, “the Univocity of Being” in: *The Philosophical Vision of John Duns Scotus*, Washington, 2005, pp 38-51.

Port of Spain —November 13-14

**A16—November 15: Solutions: *Via Negative* and spirituality**

Topics:

Maimonides

Al-Ghazali

Anthropomorphism

The limits of logic

Reading:

- Excerpts from Moses Maimonides, *The Guide to the Perplexed*.
- Excerpts from Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Deliverance from Error*.

**A17—November 17: Mysticism in the Abrahamic Traditions**

Topics:

Personal God

The Mysterious

Mythology

Cosmology

Readings:

- “The God of the Mystics”, pp. 209-256 in *Textbook*

No Class – Nov 18 (Panama Canal)

**A18—November 20: From Gods to Angels to Saints – Experience and Symbolism**

Topics:

Popular religion

Gender

Globalization-Localization

Mythology as Symbolism

“The Numinous”

Readings:

- R. Otto, “The Analysis of ‘Mysterium’”, *The Idea of the Holy*, Oxford University Press, 1958, pp. 25-30.
- W.C. Smith, “Religion as Symbolism”, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 498-500

Callao—November 22-26

**A19—November 27: New world – New Problems**

Topics:

Enlightenment

Humanism

Rationalism

Spinoza

Pantheism/Atheism

Readings:

- “Enlightenment”, pp. 293-345, in *Textbook*
- B. Spinoza, “On the Reason Why Ceremonies Were Instituted”, *Theological-Political Treatise*, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 68-80

**A20—November 29: The Death of God**

Topics:

Nietzsche

Secularization

Historicity and the loss of analogical reading

Readings:

- “The Death of God?”, pp. 346-376 in *Textbook*
- F. Nietzsche, “[Parable of the Madman](#)”, *The Gay Science*, New York, 1974, pp.181-82

Guayaquil—December 1-4

**A21—December 5: The Price of Monotheism**

Topics:

Colonialism

Truth

Religious Violence

Readings:

- J. Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism*, Stanford, 2009, pp. 12-24
- D. T. Suzuki, “East and West”, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, 1970.

**A22—December 7: God and Gender II**

Assignment:

Class presentation and discussion o field experience.

Journal reflections are due.

Puntarenas—December 9-13

Dec 12 is *Fiesta de la Yeguita* (Christianity)

**A23—December 14: Modern Existentialism**

Topics:

Existentialism – Kierkegaard, Buber

Objectivity-Subjectivity

Readings:

- M. Buber, *I and Thou* pp. 85-100
- S. Kierkegaard, “Truth is Subjectivity”, from *Essential Works of Existentialism*, pp. 22-36.
- W. James, “postscript”, pp. 267-272 in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, The Modern Library, NY, 1994

**A24—December 16: The Psychological Revival of God**

Topics:

Is God Still Relevant

Readings:

“Does God have a Future?” pp. 377-400 in *Textbook*.

No Classes—December 18

**A25—December 19-A Day Finals**

Assignment:

Final Exam - solutions to the problem of religious language

San Diego—December 22

## REQUIREMENTS/METHODS OF EVALUATION

### I. Class participation and pop quizzes 15%

Class attendance is mandatory (up to 3 absences acceptable).

Participation in class means coming prepared to class, reading and reflecting on the assigned readings, and actively participating in class discussion.

There will be unannounced quizzes on the readings and/or films watched in class

<u>A=Excellent</u>	<u>B=Good</u>	<u>C=Satisfactory</u>	<u>D=Poor</u>	<u>F=Fail</u>
attending	attending	attending class	attending class	Rarely
having read the assignments	having read the assignments	engaging in class discussions	rarely or never participating in class discussion	attending
engaging in class discussions with reference to readings or travel experiences.	rarely engaging in class discussions.	not demonstrating familiarity with the content of the reading	not demonstrating familiarity with the content of the reading	

### II. Mid- term exam 25%

One hour exam will be held on **Oct30 (A12)** on the topic: **The Birth and History of Monotheism.**

### III. Final Exam 25%

One hour exam will be held on **Dec19 (A25)** on the topic: **Solutions to the Problem of Religious Language**

### IV. Field Class and Assignment (20%)

**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 will be developed and led by the instructor

#### **Representations of the Divine in the Abrahamic Traditions (Rome) – Monday, 26 Sep.**

As the Center of the Catholic world, Rome gives a fine example of religious symbolism and representation. We will visit the Vatican Museum and St. Peter Basilica, where students will experience the grandeur of Western art. From Vatican City we will walk to the Great Synagogue of Rome, and then drive to the Mosque of Rome. In both places we will pay special notice to the experience and message created by art

#### **Learning objectives:**

1. Students will experience non-verbal representation of the divine.
2. Students will understand the theological challenges of non-verbal representation of the divine.
3. Students will experience the diverse architecture and ornamentation of religious space.
4. Students should come to question the widespread dichotomy between the Judeo-Christian and the Muslim worldschitecture, ornamentation, and costumes of worship.

#### **Assignment:**

During the field class students are asked to note and take photos of the ways in which the divine is represented in each of the three Abrahamic religions. Some manifestation of the divine are non-visual and

should be considered (visual symbol, sounds, scents, ceremonies, architectural element etc are all possible manifestation of the divine). While taking photos make sure that you understand the nature of the element you are photographing. Document the information on spot. Make sure photos are permissible. You can consult the relevant chapter in *How to Be a Perfect Stranger: The Essential Religious Etiquette Handbook* found in the Ship's library for more details regarding visiting worship sites and services.

Write a 6 page field class paper explaining the three different ways in which God is represented in worship, including:

1. Description of the elements you have noticed
  2. Reflection on the different meanings of these elements for the religious practitioner and for the student.
  3. Illustration in some detail (with ample citation) how the experience of or encounter with this element enriched the student's understanding of some class reading or lecture.
  4. Explanation of the way history, doctrine, and practice are interrelated through this observed element
- Essay is due on **A7 (Oct 15)**

#### **V. Journal Reflection on Site visits (15%)**

During your site visits pay particular attention to gendered representation of the divine. Write a 6 pages journal describing at least three encounters with gendered representation of the divine in the Latin American ports. Journal should include the following elements.

1. Description of the elements you have noticed (include photos when possible)
2. Interpretation of the elements and their different meanings for the religious practitioner and for the student.
3. Illustration in some detail (with ample citation) how the experience of or encounter with this element enriched the student's understanding of some class reading or lecture.
4. Explanation of the way history, doctrine, and practice are interrelated through this observed element

Journal is due on **A22 (Dec7)**

The class of A22 will be dedicated to an open discussion of your insights, you **MUST** bring to class one PPT slide which includes some visualization of your experience, exact instruction will be announced in advance.

#### **METHODS OF EVALUATION / 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
94-96%: A	84-86%: B	70-76%: C	
90-93%: A-	80-83%: B-	60-69%: D	



## **ATTENDANCE/ENGAGEMENT IN THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM**

Attendance in all Semester at Sea classes is mandatory, but it is at the instructor's discretion to assign a grade to the participation and attendance requirement.

Students must inform their instructors prior to any unanticipated absence and take the initiative to make up missed work in a timely fashion. Instructors must make reasonable efforts to enable students to make up work which must be accomplished under the instructor's supervision (e.g., examinations, laboratories). 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 memo from the student's home institution verifying the accommodations received on their home campus is required before any accommodation is provided on the ship. Students must submit this verification of accommodations pre-voyage as soon as possible, but no later than July 19, 2016 to [academic@isevoyages.org](mailto:academic@isevoyages.org).

## **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."

You are allowed, even encouraged, to form study groups. However, all work turned in (papers, quizzes, exams) MUST be your own work. College rules on plagiarism will apply to all of your written work, and any violation is a serious offense. Plagiarism includes copying another student's work in any capacity; and copying an author's work without proper citation. This latter category includes directly quoting a work without reference, and inappropriately paraphrasing (simply changing a few words rather than presenting the thoughts of the author in your own words). Please consult the College Handbook and the instructor if you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism. Ignorance of the rules is no excuse. For the first offense, you will receive a zero for that assignment. Any second offense will be reported to the authorities, a letter will go into your permanent file, and you will fail the course. No exceptions.

## **THE ACADEMIC STUDY OR RELIGION**

While this course makes no presuppositions about your faith-perspectives, it does insist that the variety of confessional stances be respected. You are not asked to 'believe' all materials presented, but you are expected to know the theories and to be able to engage them critically.

Primary texts, movies and other documentations are to be respectably yet critically evaluated.

## **RESERVE BOOKS AND FILMS FOR THE LIBRARY**

AUTHOR: Victor Frankl  
TITLE: Man Search for Meanings\*  
PUBLISHER: Beacon Press  
ISBN #: 080701429X  
DATE: 2006  
\*any edition would be good

## **ELECTRONIC COURSE MATERIALS**

AUTHOR: A. Altmann  
ARTICLE/CHAPTER TITLE: Article of Faith: Maimonides  
JOURNAL/BOOK TITLE: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*<sup>2</sup> (Ed. M. Berenbaum and F. Skolnik)  
VOLUME: 2  
DATE: 2007  
PAGES: 529-530

AUTHOR: A. A. B. Philips  
ARTICLE/CHAPTER TITLE: The Categories of Tawhid  
JOURNAL/BOOK TITLE: The Fundamentals of Tawheed (Islamic Monotheism),  
DATE: 2005  
PAGES: 17-42

AUTHOR: St. John of Damascus  
BOOK: [An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith](#)  
Available online as PDF:  
[https://ia800209.us.archive.org/30/items/AnExactExpositionOfTheOrthodoxFaith/An\\_Exact\\_Exposition\\_Of\\_The\\_Orthodox\\_Faith.pdf](https://ia800209.us.archive.org/30/items/AnExactExpositionOfTheOrthodoxFaith/An_Exact_Exposition_Of_The_Orthodox_Faith.pdf)

AUTHOR: Mark Smith  
TITLE: "Monotheism and the Redefinition of Divinity in Ancient Israel"  
JOURNAL: *JISMOR*  
VOUEME: 9  
PAGES: 3-19

AUTHOR: J. Brodd, L. Little, B. Nystrom, R. Patzner, R. Shek and E. Stiles

CHAPTER: The Teachings of Zoroastrianism  
BOOK: Invitation to Western Religions  
PAGES: 91-103  
DATE: 2015

AUTHOR: J.M Boy and A. Donald  
ARTICLE: Is Zoroastrianism Dualistic or Monotheistic?  
JOURNAL: *JAAR*  
VOLUME: 67/4 (1980)  
PAGES: pp. 557-588

AUTHOR: L.C. Schneider  
CHAPTER: End of the Many: the Roots of Monotheism in Greek Philosophy  
BOOK: *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity*  
YEAR: 2008.  
PAGES: 39-52

AUTHOR: Plato  
CHAPTER: [the Allegory of the Cave](#), chapter VII  
BOOK: *The Republic*  
AVAILABLE ONLINE: [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1497/1497-h/1497-h.htm#link2H\\_4\\_0010](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1497/1497-h/1497-h.htm#link2H_4_0010)

AUTHOR: Howard Eilberg-Schwartz  
CHAPTER: the divine phallus and the dilemma of masculinity  
BOOK: *God's Phallus: And Other Problems for Men and Monotheism*  
YEAR: 1995  
PAGES: 1-12.

AUTHOR: Esoteric Theological Seminary  
ARTICLE: "the Christian Goddess"  
AVAILABLE ONLINE: <http://www.northernway.org/goddess.html>

AUTHOR: H. Richard Niebuhr  
CHAPTER: Faith in God and Gods  
BOOK: *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture: With Supplementary Essays*  
YEAR: 1993  
PAGES: 114-126

AUTHOR: Thomas Aquinas  
CHAPTER: Of the Simplicity of God  
Book: *Summa Theologica*  
Available Online: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/sum006.htm>

AUTHOR: Thomas Aquinas  
CHAPTER: The Perfection of God  
Book: *Summa Theologica*  
Available Online: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/sum007.htm>

AUTHOR: Thomas Aquinas  
CHAPTER: The Existence of God in Things

Book: Summa Theologica

Available Online: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/sum011.htm>

AUTHOR: M.B. Ingham and M. Dreyer

CHAPTER: "the Univocity of Being"

BOOK: *The Philosophical Vision of John Duns Scotus*

YEAR: 2005

PAGES: 38-51

AUTHOR: Moses Maimonides

BOOK: *The Guide to the Perplexed*

AVAILABLE Online as a PDF:

[http://www.teachittome.com/seforim2/seforim/the\\_guide\\_for\\_the\\_perplexed.pdf](http://www.teachittome.com/seforim2/seforim/the_guide_for_the_perplexed.pdf)

AUTHOR: Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali

Chapter:

TITLE: Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error (al-Munqidh min al-Dalal)

YEAR: 2000

PAGES: 29-30, 51-59, 69-72

AUTHOR: Martin Buber

TITLE: *I and Thou*

YEAR: 1958 (repr. 2004)

PUBLISHER: Continuum-T&T Clark

PAGES: 85-100

AUTHOR: S. Kierkegaard

CHAPTER: "Truth is Subjectivity"

BOOK: *Reality, Man and Existence: Essential Works of Existentialism*

YEAR: 1965

PAGES: pp. 22-36

AUTHOR: W. James

CHAPTER: postscript

BOOK: *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

YEAR: 1994

PAGES: 267-272

AUTHOR: W.C. Smith

ARTICLE: "Religion as Symbolism"

TITLE: *Encyclopedia Britannica*

YEAR: 1974

PAGES: 498-500

AUTHOR: R. Otto

CHAPTER: The Analysis of 'Mysterium' (chapter 5)

TITLE: The Idea of the Holy

PUBLISHER: Oxford University Press

ISBN #: 0195002105

DATE: 1958

PAGES: 25-30

AUTHOR: B. Spinoza

CHAPTER: "On the Reason Why Ceremonies Were Instituted" (ch. 5)

TITLE: *Theological-Political Treatise*

YEAR: Cambridge, 2007

PAGES: pp. 68-80

AUTHOR: D. T. Suzuki

CHAPTER: "East and West" – 1<sup>st</sup> lecture

BOOK: *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*

YEAR: 1970.

Be warned: A History of God is not a tidy linear history. Rather, we learn that the definition of God is constantly being repeated, altered, discarded, and resurrected through the ages, responding to its followers' practical concerns rather than to mystical mandates. Armstrong also shows us how Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have overlapped and influenced one another, gently challenging the secularist history of each of these religions. - -Gail Hudson. Review. "The most fascinating and learned study of the biggest wild goose chase in history—the quest for God. Karen Armstrong is a genius." A.N. Wilson, author of Jesus: A Life. See all Product description. With such bestsellers as A History of God and Islam, Karen Armstrong has consistently delivered "penetrating, readable, and prescient" (The New York Times) works that have lucidly engaged a wide range of religions and religious issues. In Buddha she turns. In the Beginning: A New Interpretation of Genesis. by Karen Armstrong. 1997. 3.88. 482 Ratings. The power of Genesis lies in its stories, especially those of the creation, the Fall, Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph. Armstrong traces the grand design of Genesis and its great themes, examines its stories in fascinatin