

CPRL 400: RELIGION, THE MEDIA, AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

Spring 2009—W 4:00-6:45 in H 224

Instructor: Dr. Benjamin J. Hubbard

Office Hours: M 2:30-3:30, W 10-11 in University Hall 308 (or by appointment)

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*Hubbard
Syllabus*

"Education is what remains after one has forgotten everything he [she] learned in school."
Albert Einstein

CATALOG DESCRIPTION: Prerequisite—AMST 201 or COMM 233 or HIST 180 or CPRL 105 or 110. Religion reporting in the secular media; the religious press in America; the influence of the media, both secular and religious, on the shaping of society's values; ethical dilemmas faced by reporters.

AIMS: To (1) acquaint students with the religious background of America, including the First Amendment's "establishment" and "free exercise" clauses; (2) describe the contemporary U.S. religious landscape; (3) assess religion reporting in the general print and broadcast media; (4) assess the religious media, including TV evangelism; (5) become conversant with the religion resources available on the Web; (6) study the impact of the non-print media—film, radio, television, music, and the Internet—on culture and values; (7) increase students' awareness of the ethical issues faced by reporters, editors and people in all professions.

OUTCOMES: A. GENERAL: Enhanced religious and media literacy. **B. SPECIFIC:**

(1) Improved writing skills through the class assignments and the professor's critique of this work; (2) improved public speaking skills through frequent class discussions; (3) greater familiarity with the religion resources available on the World Wide Web; (4) increased appreciation for the challenges faced by journalists, particularly those who write about religion and ethics; (5) increased sensitivity to issues of religious and cultural diversity in contemporary society; (6) a better grasp of religious diversity and of the place of religion in American life.

TEXTBOOKS:

1. Claire Badaracco (ed.), *Quoting God (How Media Shape Ideas about Religion and Culture)* (available at Little Professor Book Center, 725 N. Placentia Ave., Fullerton). Designated as **QG** in assignment section of syllabus.
2. Jon Meacham, *American Gospel (God, the Founding Fathers and the Making of a Nation)*. Designated as **AM** in assignment section; also available at Little Professor.
3. *Religion in the News*, winter 2009 (a magazine that may be distributed later but is available online at www.trincoll.edu/depts/csrpl)

GRADING:

1. Mid-Term Exam: worth 20% of final grade
2. Course Summary: 10%
3. Book Review: 15%
4. Summaries of articles from *Religion in the News*: 10%
5. Homework questions based on chapters in *Quoting God* (six assignments each worth 5% with lowest one dropped): 25%
6. Report on Media Religion Coverage: 10%
7. Film Review: 10%

Grading Ranges:

98-100: A+ 94-97: A 90-93: A- 87-89: B+ 83-86: B 80-82: B-

76-79: C+ 70-75: C 68-69: C- 65-67: D+ 62-64: D 60-61: D-

NATURE OF REQUIREMENTS:

1. The **mid-term exam on March 25** will consist of essay questions on lecture content through March 18. The **course summary** will consist of recaps and reflections on each of the classes from March 25-May 13, including assessments of films/videos and music, and of the impact of the course overall. **Length: two pages/600 words, due on May 20 by 5:00 p.m. (Earlier submissions welcome.)**

2. The **book review** of *American Gospel* will consist of (a) a concise summary of the book's contents; (b) an assessment of the book (what did you find valuable and not valuable, and why?); and (c) a brief comment on how the book has affected your thinking about religion in America. **Length: 750 words. Due: April 15**

3. The **summaries** will be of any four articles of your choosing from *Religion in the News*. We will have an in-class discussion of the articles on the day the summaries are due (**March 11**). **Length: about 600 words for the entire assignment.**

4. The report on **coverage of religion and ethics in the print or electronic media** will consist of a succinct summary and assessment of the types of religion/ethics stories covered. *You may approach this in one of two ways:* (1) choose one newspaper, magazine or website and follow its coverage of a variety of religion- or ethics-related stories; (2) choose a theme, e.g., religiously motivated terrorism, or religion's role in the Obama administration, and follow it in several different media. I will soon distribute a sign-up sheet listing newspapers, newsmagazines and websites/blogs to choose from. **Length: about 450 words. You will have five minutes to summarize your report to the class, and your oral presentation may enhance your grade on the written report. Due Date: May 13.**

5. The **film review** will be of a motion picture of your choosing with a distinctly religious or ethical theme. Examples: "Blood Diamond," "Babel," "Munich," "Schindler's List," "The Nativity Story," "Flags of Our Fathers," "Religulous," "Doubt," "Milk," "Slumdog Millionaire." The review will cover the film's artistic qualities and its religious, spiritual or ethical impact. **Length: about 600 words. Due Date: May 6.**

ALTERNATE ASSIGNMENT TO FILM REVIEW: A few students may elect to make a class presentation on religious and ethical themes in popular music instead of writing the film review. If so, you would have about 10-12 minutes to play selected music and explain its religious or ethical significance. A one-page sheet for your classmates with the lyrics and a short explanation of why you chose particular artists and their music is also required. Anyone choosing this option should inform me no later than March 25. There will be an opportunity for such presentations on April 15.

6. The **homework assignments** will consist of three or four questions to be answered very briefly (about **100 words** per question). These will be based on your reading of the following six chapters in *Quoting God*: 2, 3, 4, 5, 9 & 10. However, if another chapter really grabs you, see me and we'll devise homework questions from it.

Notes: 1. Although not required, short emails to ask questions or make observations about the class (even constructively critical ones) are welcome. And I will occasionally pose a question to all of you via Blackboard email on a relevant issue to which you may respond. Such communications may raise your final grade if it is hovering between, e.g., a C+ and B-. Of

course, asking questions in class can also help.

2. Please don't email assignments to me unless you are ill, or have some other emergency, and can't attend class.

ATTENDANCE POLICY: Because of the interactive nature of this class and the participation of several guest lecturers, attendance is expected at all meetings. Also, please put away your laptops and turn off cell phones, Blackberrys and other electronic devices.

POLICY ON LATE PAPERS: If any assignment is submitted after the due date, you will receive a half-point reduction per class day (M-F) late (e.g., from 10 to 9.5). The course summary paper is due on May 20 and will not be accepted thereafter. A serious medical or other reason is the only exception to these policies. **N.B.** *If you miss an assignment due date, don't despair—get it done and you'll still get most of the credit.*

POLICY ON DISHONESTY: Cheating or plagiarism is not acceptable in this class, and university policies on the matter will be enforced.

TOPIC & ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Assignment</i>
January 28	1. Why Study Religion and the Media? 2. Class Interview-Survey 3. America's Religious Roots	
February 4	1. A Profile of Religious America (see www.pewforum.org) 2. The Current Religious Landscape: Catholics, Liberal Protestants & Evangelicals 3. Videos on Evangelical and Latino Christians <u>Sign up for media coverage assignment</u>	QG, Ch. 4 AM, Intro
February 11	1. Current Religious Landscape: Jews & Muslims; non-religious/secular Americans 2. Religion & the First Amendment (Case studies for small-group work)	QG, Ch. 3 AM, Ch. 1
February 18	1. Current Religious Landscape: Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs 2. Religion in the Presidential Race: A Retrospective 3. Religious Tensions in the Workplace (case studies)	AM, Ch. 2 QG, Ch. 2
February 25	1. Religion on TV and Radio 2. TV Evangelism: video excerpts from several sources & investigative reports on Benny Hinn	QG, Ch. 5
March 4	1. The Challenges of the Religion Beat (Guest lecture by Bill Lobdell, author of <i>Losing My Religion: How I Lost My Faith Reporting on Religion in America—and Found Unexpected Peace</i>) 2. Religious Themes in Popular TV Shows (episode of "House")	QG, Ch. 9

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| March 11 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Religion in the secular print media 2. Religious magazines and newspapers <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Summaries of articles from Religion in the News due</i></p> |
| March 18 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Journalistic Ethics in the Digital World (guest lecture by Professor Steve Burgard, Northeastern University) Read his "Twitter Journalism": www.northeastern.edu/firstamendment/index.php 2. Case studies of ethics in journalism and elsewhere |
| March 25 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does the Media Contribute to Violence? 2. Roundtable discussion of the media-violence connection 3. MID-TERM EXAM (<u>first half of class period</u>) |
| April 1 | NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK |
| April 8 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dealing with Internet Pornography QG, Ch. 10
(Guest lecturer to be announced) 2. Class discussion of media pornography and Internet predators |
| April 15 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Media's Impact on Values 2. Video: "The Merchants of Cool" 3. Religion and Popular Music (with musical selections) <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Book review due</i></p> |
| April 22 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Religion in Film (guest lecture by film writer Mark Sevi) 2. View and discuss film excerpts |
| April 29 | Viewing and Discussion of feature-length film "The Sea Within" |
| May 6 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Class discussion of film reviews 2. Documentary films—A Study in Contrasts
(Viewing of excerpts from "The Iron Wall" and "Obsession") <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Film review due</i></p> |
| May 13 | Student Oral Reports on Media Coverage of Religion and Ethics |
| | <i>Report on media coverage due</i> |
| May 20 | <i>Course Summary due in UH-308 or 313 by 5:00 p.m. (Earlier submissions welcome.)</i> |