

REL 225: Encountering Religion

Agnes Scott College Fall 2018 MW 11:30 am-12:45 pm, Buttrick 205

Instructor: Prof. Tina Pippin, Buttrick 218; x6227; 678-984-4701-cell

Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:30-4:30 pm and by appointment

SASS Representative: Peyton Capeheart (pcapeheart@agnesscott.edu)



[fulfills Leadership Skills Across the Liberal Arts; Summit in Arts and Humanities]

Course Description:

In this course we will explore the concept of religion/s in scholarship and culture, engage theories and methods in religious studies, and use interdisciplinary tools to explore the religious worlds in Atlanta and beyond. Cultural studies and critical theories of a range of voices (feminist/womanist, postcolonial, queer) will converse with us about the concept of “religion.” We will rethink ways to engage theories and methods in religious studies, grounding these practices in concrete, contemporary explorations, using a cultural studies lens and methodology around generative themes. The study of theories and methods in religious studies requires an intersectional approach in the twenty-first century. And these theories and methods link to “lived religion,” so we will make room to incorporate any significant current “happenings” in the world as part of our encounters.

Learning Objectives:

Students will probe questions of value, ultimate concerns, existence, afterlife, ritual processes, “the sacred” in spaces and texts, and the ways the major questions about the divine and spirituality are lived out and experienced.

- Explore the terrain of “religion/s” and “religious” in scholarly debates.
- Examine some major categories in the interdisciplinary study of religion: e.g. Word, Belief, Myth, God, Text, Ritual, Body, Space, Practice/Performance, Things, Sensation, Culture, Event.
- Analyze the major theoretical movements that intersect with religious studies, in particular critical theory and cultural studies.
- Evaluate the effects of these theories on and against lived experience.
- Interpret course material using interdisciplinary tools.
- Apply these theories and methodologies to concrete “encounters”—either with “objects” (visual, media, material, textual) or experiential assignments and field trips.

We are using five categories as concrete “markers” on the journey:

1. Defining: words, terms, concepts
2. Reinventing: major movements and debates
3. Disrupting: revolutionary ideas in the field/s that change/d the conversation
4. Transgressing: border crossing disciplines and social change
5. Activating: experiential and justice-oriented ideas and actions

The range of pedagogical theories and practices in this course is experiential and embodied, and flexible depending on the needs of our class. We will be examining educator Paulo Freire’s dictum of reading the word in the world: “To speak a true word is to transform the world.” As we investigate and engage different voices and spaces of “religion,” we are drawing on our own experiences and knowledges as we converse with a diversity of scholars, local sites and practitioners, and current events.

Texts:

Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms in Religious Studies*, University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Articles from religious studies and critical and cultural theory on our course Moodle site, available as library e-books, or available online through library databases (especially ATLA).

Plus course material we can anticipate but not determine: from current events: news media (visual and print), art, music, film, and new publications in religion. These materials will be part of our common reading/viewing as time unfolds. We will be scanning social media, websites, and news to discover current conversations.

Assignments:

Four 5-6 page papers (except for submission of a video project: this involves a shorter, theory-linked, explanative paper) linked with the course readings and experiences (around 20-25 pages total for the semester; there is one revision of each paper;). Each

student will meet with me to discuss the proposals for each paper: each paper is **20%** of your grade for the course. When there are class presentations included as part of the paper, the presentation counts for 5% of the total grade.

1. **Defining Religion:** (*all students*): This paper-portfolio will be in two parts: Part One: near the beginning of the course and Part Two at the end. Each part is 5-6 pages and will count as two papers. In these papers you will engage the course material, experiences, and conversations around a generative theme of your choice. Include all materials in your bibliography. Class presentation and papers due on **Monday, Sept. 26.**

Choose **two** from this group:

2. **Textual encounter:** You will choose one verse or short passage or theme in a religious text (Bible; Qur'an; The Sutras; The Vedas, etc.) and enter into the scholarly discussion. Conversation with current events and texts and critical scholarship on the text is one way to approach this textual reading. For example, you may want to further investigate the voices of critical biblical scholarship and critical theory around the Binding of Isaac story we're studying in class. Or Black Lives Matter Decatur (CC4D) may rely on certain key texts in their theological formations around race and justice, and you want to pull out and investigate these texts within the scholarly discourse. Or Tribulation Trail (Fridays and Saturdays, Oct. 5-Nov. 3, Eastside Baptist Church, Stockbridge, GA) in has a particular reading of the biblical end times and you look further into apocalyptic literature and culture and its links with the current political climate. **Due: Monday, Oct. 29.**
3. **Film critic:** For those who want to deepen their knowledge and ability at writing on religion and film, this assignment is to give you experience with the major tools of film theory connected with critical theory. We are studying *The Matrix* in class, along with some theoretical links, so this film is a logical choice. But if you have another film in mind, please make a proposal for writing on it (one paragraph proposal due by the end of September). **Due Wednesday, Nov. 28.**
4. **Experience in space:** In this paper you would investigate a "sacred space" (e.g. a religious institution or the Elvis Vault at the Star Bar) or compare two spaces (e.g. Glen Memorial Methodist Church and The Temple on Peachtree Street, designed by the same architect). Or our Tribulation Trail field trip. You will also utilize "space theory" to decode your spaces (Edward Soja; Henri Lefebvre; David Harvey, et al.; for this project I will supply the initial sources, if needed). **Due Monday, Nov. 5.**
5. **Material world:** Art, music, dance, kitsch, Coke all have intersections with religion. Religious artifacts at local museums—the High Museum, the Carlos Museum at Emory University and other local art galleries and street art, the World of Coke, the National Center for Civil and Human Rights—and other local exhibit sites often include representations of visual culture and religion. Using theorists

- such as David Morgan and Colleen McDannell on material religion and visual culture, choose a theme or object/s to investigate. **Due Monday, Oct. 1.**
6. **Coffee with a theorist:** If there is a particular theorist who inspires, annoys, or makes you curious to investigate further, you will give a brief overview of the theorist and her/his/their connection to religious studies. For example, a spark question might be: Why do so many religion scholars use Jacques Derrida, Homi Bhabha, Julia Kristeva, Gayatri Spivak, Judith Butler, etc.? Or: how are Cornel West and bell hooks responding to current U.S. cultural trends? How is the Rev. Dr. William Barber II using sacred texts in the New Poor People's Movement? How are religious theorists responding to issues in the November 2018 U.S. election? In this paper you will discover some ways to interact with the theorist and enter the critical discourse, using their classic theoretical writing and any new connections they are making. **Due Monday, Nov. 19.**
 7. **Election 2018:** We will be discussing the current election and how candidates use religion in their campaign. I suggest either following one campaign (e.g. the governor's race in Georgia *or* another campaign) or an issue (health care, reproductive justice, worker rights, lgbtq rights, "religious freedom," second amendment, immigration, climate change, etc.). Robert P. Jones (CEO, Public Religion Research Institute), *The End of White Christian America* (Simon and Schuster, 2016) is the primary text for this paper. We are reading one chapter (ch. 2) from the book and also the current work of his organization (<https://www.ppri.org/research-home/>). You will follow some aspect of the national presidential election until Nov. 6, through the local lens of the CC4D interfaith movement in Decatur or another organization (like PPRI, Georgia WAND, SPARC, etc.). **Due Monday, Nov. 12.** (<https://www.facebook.com/CC4DecaturBlackLivesMatter/>)
 8. **Media mogul:** (best done with a partner from the class). Video mapping of "what is religious studies?" with current Religious Studies majors and alumna: development of research questions, creation of the video plus clips to post on the Department of Religious Studies website. An accompanying paper describing the project, process, and outcomes and remaining questions raised is part of the media project. **Due Friday, Nov. 30.**

Note: Depending on your choices, you may petition for alternative due dates on one paper.

You may petition for a two-day extension on any paper with a CWS tutor visit (and email from the tutor to alert me at least 24 hours ahead of the due date).

Project Presentations:

You will choose one of your papers (not the defining religion parts one and two) to present to the class on Dec. 3, Dec. 5, or Dec. 10.

Revision option: Students may revise each paper one time, in consultation with the instructor, peers, and CWS tutors. Revised papers are due one week after first final draft returned with feedback. Revision guidelines are on Moodle.

Class Participation: 20 %

Active participation in class will take many forms and is based on presence in class and preparation of the course readings and engagement of the material through questions and critique and conversation and other pedagogical methods. More than 3 absences (for any reason, sickness included) will result in a grade reduction of 1/3 letter grade, and more than 7 absences in failure of the course. Legitimate religious holidays are not included, but notice must be given.

Grading scale: 93 to 100; A 90 to less than 93; A- 87 to less than 90; B+ 83 to less than 87; B 80 to less than 83; B- 77 to less than 80; C+ 73 to less than 77; C 70 to less than 73; C- 67 to less than 70; D+ 63 to less than 67; D 60 to less than 63 D; Less than 60 F

Safe Agnes Scott Students (SASS):

SASS is a student leadership group that emerged in the Department of Religious Studies in order to assist in creating “safe and brave enough” and honorable spaces in the classroom. SASS helps us create a democratic classroom space in which students and professors are mutually accountable to each other in the learning process. The SASS representative will be working with students on evaluations (at midterm), and also on a syllabus review the second day of class. The representative is also available outside of the classroom to discuss any questions or concerns (i.e. questions about assignments, or concerns about race, gender, sexuality, religion, etc.) that students don’t feel comfortable bringing to the professor, or other students. Conversations are held in confidence, but professors will be alerted to any general or specific concerns as needed.

Due dates for papers:

Defining Religion:

1. Part One: Due Monday, **September 26**

2. Part Two: Due Wednesday, **November 14**

Third Paper: Due: depending on your choice (see above list)

Fourth Paper: Due: depending on your choice (see above list)

Course Schedule:

DAY	Topic	Readings, etc.
W– Aug 29	1 st DAY OF CLASS	Introduction to each other and the course; setting class agreements <i>Note: Monday, Sept. 3 is Labor Day: no class</i>
W- Sept 5	Defining Religion	Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in Mark C. Taylor, <i>Critical Terms</i>
M- Sept 10	The Holy, the Sacred, the Profane	Mircea Eliade, ch. 1, “Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred,” in <i>The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion</i> (Harcourt Brace, 1987) and Mary Daly, “After the Death of God the Father,” ch. 1 in <i>Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation</i> (Beacon Press, 1973: on Moodle.
W Sept 12	Class options on Thursday, Sept. 13 instead of Wed: attend one (or both!)	Reading tba: 1. 1-1:50 pm in the Luchsinger Lounge (Alston): Ph.D. candidate at Yale U. and Agnes Scott College alumna Lucia Hulsether to lecture on Interfaith Religion in America. 2. Alumna Rev. Connie Tuttle of Circle of Grace church in Decatur book launch: 8-9:30 pm in the Chapel: <i>A Gracious Heresy: The Queer Calling of an Unlikely Prophet</i> , Resource Books, 2018.
M- Sept. 17	Critical Race Theory and Religion	The End of White Christian America—excerpt Cornell West, “A Genealogy of Modern Racism,” ch. 5 from <i>Prophecy Deliverance: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity</i> (Louisville: Westminster/JohnKnox, 2002) And Robert P. Jones, ch. 2, “Vital Signs: A Divided and Dying White Christian America” (from <i>The End of White Christian America</i> , Simon& Schuster, 2016) on Moodle.
W- Sept 19	Material Religion	Margaret Miles, “Image,” in <i>Critical Terms</i> and David Morgan, “Defining Visual Culture,” from <i>The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice</i> (Univ. of California Press, 2005): on Moodle <i>Proposals for semester assignments due today!</i>

M-Sept 24	The Midterm Elections: examining one issue	Diane Winston, "Religion, Politics, and the Media," <i>American Quarterly</i> issue on <i>Religion, Politics in the Contemporary United States</i> , ed. R. Marie Griffith and Melanie McAlister, Vol. 59/3 (Sept. 2007): 969-989. And: Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House": http://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Lorde_The_Masters_Tools.pdf
W-Sept 26	Defining Religion	Class Roundtable Discussion on: "What is Religion?" <i>Part One Definition Papers due today in class</i> <i>[Peyton checks in]</i>
M-Oct 1	Reading Religion in the Election	Religious Freedom Restoration Acts: http://www.ncsl.org/research/civil-and-criminal-justice/2017-religious-freedom-restoration-act-legislation.aspx and other readings tba (guided by current events leading up to the election)
W-Oct 3	Civil Religion in America	Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America": on Moodle <i>Tuesday, October 9 is election day!</i>
M-Oct 8	Civil Religion and Civil Rights	Charles H. Long, "Civil Rights—Civil Religion: Visible People and Invisible Religion" and ch. 10, "The Oppressive Elements in Religion and the Religion of the Oppressed," pp. 161-186 in <i>Significations: Signs, Symbols and Images in the Interpretation of Religion</i> (Davies Group, 1999): McCain library e-book. <i>Midterm evaluations handed out today.</i>
W-Oct 10	Religious Freedom	Tisa Wenger, ch. 6: "Religious Freedom and the Category of Religion into the Twenty-First Century," in <i>We Have a Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance and American Religious Freedom</i> (University of North Carolina Press, 2009). Available as a library e-book.
M-Oct 15	When Religion Becomes Evil	Bruce Lincoln, "Conflict" and "Transformation" in <i>Critical Terms</i> Talal Asad, "Terrorism," in <i>On Suicide Bombing</i> (Columbia University Press, 2005) <i>Midterm evaluation with SASS today!</i>

W- Oct 17	Ritual	Catherine Bell, "Performance," in <i>Critical Terms Bring to class today: one "religious" object important to you that you can share with the class</i>
M- Oct 22	The Invention of God	Francis Schüssler-Fiorenza and Gordon D. Kaufman, "God," in <i>Critical Terms</i>
W- Oct 24	Sacrifice	Jill Robbins, "Sacrifice," in <i>Critical Terms</i> Nancy Jay, ch. 8, "Sacrifice, Descent and the Patriarchs," in <i>Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity</i> (University of Chicago Press, 1992).
M- Oct 29	Sacred Texts: The Akedah: The Binding of Isaac	Genesis 22 (New Revised Standard Version of the Bible): www.biblegateway.com ; Søren Kierkegaard, selection from <i>Fear and Trembling</i> , trans. Howard and Edna Honig (Princeton UP, 1983): on Moodle [Peyton checks in]
W- Oct 31	The Afterlives of The Binding of Isaac	Jacques Derrida, "Whom to Give To (Knowing Not to Know), ch. 3 in <i>The Gift of Death</i> , 2 nd edition, trans. David Willis (University of Chicago Press, 2007) Jacques Lacan, "Introduction to the Names-of-the-Father Seminar": http://users.clas.ufl.edu/burt/LACANNamesOfTheFather.pdf
M- Nov 5	Religious Experience	Ann Pellegrini, "Signaling through the Flames": Hell House Performance and Structures of Religious Feeling," <i>American Quarterly</i> , Vol. 59, No. 3, "Religion and Politics in the Contemporary U.S." (Sept. 2007): 911-935. (JSTOR) Field trip! (Tba): Tribulation Trail , Eastside Baptist Church, Stockbridge, GA: http://www.tribulationtrail.org/
W- Nov 7	Locating Our Selves in Religion	Donald S. Lopez, Jr., "Belief" and Robert H. Scharf, "Experience" in <i>Critical Terms</i>
M- Nov 12	Space Theory	Yi-Fu Tuan, "Sacred Spaces," in Karl Butzer, ed., <i>Explorations of an Idea: Dimensions of Human Geography</i> , University of Chicago Research Papers, 1978: on Moodle
W- Nov 14	Rethinking Our Definitions of Religion	"Religion" in Mircea Eliade, ed., <i>The Encyclopedia of Religion</i> (McCain reference room and on Moodle) Our second class roundtable discussion. Part Two of What Is Religion? due today.

M- Nov 19	AAR/SBL in Denver, CO: No class	
W- Nov 21	THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASSES	
M- Nov 26	Postmodernism and Religion	Michel Foucault, “Panopticism,” from <i>Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison</i> (Vintage, 1998): http://dm.ncl.ac.uk/courseblog/files/2011/03/michel-foucault-panopticism.pdf Dinner and a movie! 7-9 pm: at Tina’s house, 25 2 nd Ave. NE: <i>The Matrix</i>
W- Nov 28	<i>The Matrix</i>	Slavoj Žižek, “The Third Pill”: on Moodle
W- Nov 21	Religion and Culture	Tomoko Masuzawa, “Culture, ” in <i>Critical Terms</i>
M- Nov 26	The Future of Religion	Bruce Lawrence, “Transformation” in <i>Critical Terms</i>
W- Nov 28	The Religious Body	Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto,” pp. 149-181 in <i>Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature</i> (New York: Routledge, 1991): http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Haraway-CyborgManifesto-1.pdf William R. LaFleur, “Body,” and Daniel Boyarin, “Gender,” in <i>Critical Terms</i>
M- Dec 3	Project presentations	
W- Dec 5	Project presentations	
M- Dec 10	Project presentations	

T- Dec 11	Reading Day	
DEC 12- 17	EXAMS	

Note: This syllabus is subject to change due to the link of theory to contemporary happenings, with consensus of the class.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

The Agnes Scott College honor code embodies an ideal of character, conduct, and citizenship, and is an important part of the College's mission and core identity. This applies especially to academic honesty and integrity. Passing off someone else's work as your own represents intellectual fraud and theft, and violates the core values of our academic community. To be honorable, you should understand not only what counts as academic dishonesty, but also how to avoid engaging in these practices. You should:

- review each course syllabus for the professor's expectations regarding course work and class attendance.
- attribute all ideas taken from other sources; this shows respect for other scholars. Plagiarism can include portraying another's work or ideas as your own, buying a paper online and turning it in as if it were your own work, or not citing or improperly citing references on a reference page or within the text of a paper.
- not falsify or create data and resources or alter a graded work without the prior consent of your professor. This includes making up a reference for a works cited page or making up statistics or facts for academic work.
- not allow another party to do your work/exam, or submit the same or similar work in more than one course without permission from the course instructors. Cheating also includes taking an exam for another person, looking on another person's exam for answers, using exams from previous classes without permission, or bringing and using unauthorized notes or resources (i.e., electronic, written, or otherwise) during an exam.
- not facilitate cheating, which can happen when you help another student complete a take home exam, give answers to an exam, talk about an exam with a student who has not taken it, or collaborate with others on work that is supposed to be completed independently.

- be truthful about the submission of work, which includes the time of submission and the place of submission (e.g., e-mail, online, in a mailbox, to an office, etc.) You should understand that penalties result from dishonest conduct, ranging from failure of the assignment to expulsion from the college. You should speak with your professors if you need clarification about any of these policies.

Modified Pledge

Students pledge that they have completed assignments honestly by attaching the following statement to each test, quiz, paper, overnight assignment, in-class essay, or other work:

I pledge that I have neither given nor received any unauthorized aid on this assignment.

Signed _____

Accommodations:

If you will need accommodations in this class, please contact Kelly Deasy in the Office of Academic Advising (X6150) to make complete the registration process. Once registered, please contact me so we can discuss the specific accommodations needed for this course.

Student resources:

- a. Academic Advising: <http://www.agnesscott.edu/academicadvising/>
- b. The Writing Center: http://writing_center.agnesscott.edu/
- c. The Speaking Center: http://speaking_center.agnesscott.edu/
- d. McCain Library: <http://library.agnesscott.edu/>
- e. Educational Technology Center: <http://www.agnesscott.edu/its/educational-technology/>
- f. Wellness Center: <http://legacy.agnesscott.edu/studentlife/wellnesscenter>
- g. Academic Catalog: <http://www.agnesscott.edu/academics/academic-catalog/index.html>
- h. Academic Calendar: <http://www.agnesscott.edu/registrar/academic-calendar.html>
- i. Registrar: <http://www.agnesscott.edu/registrar/>
- j. Student Handbook: <http://www.agnesscott.edu/facultyservices/files/documents/student-handbook.pdf>

Title IX: For the safety of the entire community, any incidence of, or information about, sexual misconduct must be reported immediately to Title IX Coordinator Marti Fessenden (mfessenden@agnesscott.edu, 404-471-6547), Deputy Title IX Coordinator Karen Gilbert (kgilbert@agnesscott.edu, 404-471-6435), or Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students Karen Goff (kgoff@agnesscott.edu, 404-471-6449).

