

RS 234-001 (24825)/ ILS 234-001 (24878)  
Fall, 2021  
Course Credits: 3 (open to honors students)  
Tuesday and Thursday 11:00 AM-12:15 PM, Humanities 2251

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## Genres of Western Religious Writing



A quick scan of some headlines of *Religion News Service*, a religious news publication on the web, provides dispatches about papal support for the trans community, environmentally friendly burials, livestreamed worship services, Barbecue Baptists, the conversion of the Hagia Sophia into a mosque, racial reconciliation and racial justice, and online seekers discovering Buddhism during the pandemic. Though this snapshot of headlines might look like a big religious smorgasbord, it is also indicative of the situation of religion in “the West” today. Religion in “the West” resembles more and more a confusing patchwork of ideas, cultures, identities, and practices. “The West” is no longer dominated by one distinct tradition (i.e., mainline Protestantism or Roman Catholicism), nor by one exclusive organizational form (i.e., the Church). As a result, in and outside the academy, a comparative and trans-traditional approach to religious ideas and their social manifestations has taken hold.

*Genres of Western Religious Writing* has been developed with this approach as its methodological guide. It offers an introduction to some of the main genres of Western religious writing (i.e., scripture, prayer, pilgrimage, myth, and ritual) as well as legacies and challenges of Western religious traditions (i.e. pluralism, authority, race, and violence). This class is based on the premise that closer study of certain genres across cultures and traditions can offer a fresh look onto the religious economy and moral imagination in “the West”.

During the course of the semester we will read religious (or spiritual) memoirs by Danya Ruttenberg, Rachel Held Evans, Malala Yousafzai, and Haroon Moghul. Memoirs are a central genre of Western religious writing since Augustin of Hippo’s (358-430) famous *Confessions*, in which he tells his readers about his own

troubled youth and his conversion to Christianity. The memoirs will serve as fields to test ideas about socio-religious formations, religious pluralism, identity, and criticism. We will examine the concept of ritual, explore the idea of “braided histories of the Abrahamic Traditions,” discuss the concept of “double belonging,” consider how racial and religious identities intersect, and assess recent changes of the American religious landscape more generally. We will have the opportunity to talk about braided histories with Prof. emer. Charles L. Cohen and about double belonging with Prof. emer. Paul Knitter.

**Course Policies:** As a *Communication B* course, this class is designed as a reading- and writing-intensive course, which follows the standard UW-Madison rules and requirements for such classes. The class also allows for regular oral participation and presentation. It meets for two 75-minute class periods each week over the semester and “carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, problem sets, studying, etc.) for about 3-4 hours out of classroom for every class period.” I will frequently, but not always, give you prompts for the readings.

Aside from the three written assignments and four short (one to two paragraphs) responses (see below), each student is required to give an 8-10 minutes power-point presentation in class on a selected religious topic or thinker. Some bibliographical information will be provided, but students should plan to use the library (or online) resources to prepare for their presentation. Each presentation needs to be emailed or submitted to the instructor no later than 10:00 PM the day before the presentation. Presentations end with **three questions** for class discussion.

There are two Writing Fellows from the UW-Madison Writing Center assigned to this class. A Writing Fellow will meet with you twice for about 30 minutes and respond to a draft of two of your essays. The Fellow will help you to revise and improve your essays. You are required to submit your draft and your final version of these two essays as well as the written comments by the Writing Fellow. You will be graded on the final versions of these essays.

**Learning outcomes:**

- 1.) Identify and explain the main genres of Western religious writing
- 2.) Identify and explain some of the legacies and challenges of Western religious traditions, including the issues of pluralism, authority, race, identity, and violence.
- 3.) Critically evaluate the religious economy and moral imagination of “the West.”
- 4.) Demonstrate proficiency in close reading, interpretation, and written and oral analysis.
- 5.) Demonstrate proficiency in categorizing, analyzing, and comparing diverse systems of value and belief in a variety of contexts.

**Late Work Policy:** Assignments turned in late will be downgraded half a letter grade for every 24 hours unless a special agreement has been made with the instructor prior to the deadline of the assignment.

**Special Notes Regarding Covid-19:**

During the global COVID-19 pandemic, we must prioritize our collective health and safety to keep ourselves, our campus, and our community safe. As a university community, we must work together to prevent the spread of the virus and to promote the collective health and welfare of our campus and surrounding community.

Students should continually monitor themselves for COVID-19 [symptoms](#) and get [tested](#) for the virus if they have symptoms or have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19. Students should reach out to me as soon as possible if they become ill or need to isolate or quarantine, in order to make alternate plans for how to proceed with the course. Students are strongly encouraged to communicate with me

concerning their illness and the anticipated extent of their absence from the course. I will work with the student to provide alternative ways to complete the course work.

**Students need to wear masks during class time unless they show written proof of exemption by the McBurney Center.**

**Academic Integrity:** “By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison’s community of scholars in which everyone’s academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review.” For more information, go to [studentconduct.wiscweb.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/](http://studentconduct.wiscweb.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/).

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: McBurney Disability Resource Center syllabus statement:** “The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.” For more information on this issue, go to <http://mcburney.wisc.edu/facstaffother/faculty/syllabus.php>

**Diversity and Inclusion:** “Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.” For more information regarding UW-Madison’s diversity policy, go to <https://diversity.wisc.edu/>

**Grading will be determined as follows:**

Discussion/participation/attendance = 30%

One 8-10 minutes oral presentation = 10%

Four short responses (1-2 paragraphs) posted on Canvas (2.5% each) = 10%

One shorter paper (3-4 pages; about 1200-1600 words) = 10%

Two larger papers (6-7 pages; [\*Pre-Med students may write their final paper as an 8-10 pages one as required for application to Med School] about 2,400-2,800 [3,200-4,000] words; 20% each = 40%

Total = 100%

The grade scale is: A=100-94%; AB=93-88%; B=87-83%; BC=82-77%; C=76-70%; D=69-60%.

**Class papers need to be submitted as hardcopies.**

**Extra Credit:** You will get 6-8 pts. added toward one of the large papers if you write either a review of the movie *Whale Rider* (2002; available online in the library) in which you discuss the concept of myth and its functions in the movie, or a book review of Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (2017) that draws on our course readings on “Race and Religion.” The reviews need to be 3-4 pp. (1200-1600 words) long. They are due on Friday, December 17 at 6:00 PM. Each student can write only one extra credit paper.

**Books That Need to be Purchased**

Cohen, Charles L., *The Abrahamic Religions* (2020).

Evans, Rachel Held, *Faith Unraveled: How a Girl Who Knew All the Answers Learned to Ask Questions* (2014).

Moghul, Haroon, *How to be a Muslim: An American Story* (2017).

Ruttenberg, Danya, *Surprised by God: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Religion* (2008).

Yousafzai, Malala, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up For Education And Was Shoot By The Taliban* (2013).

**The Following Readings Will Be Uploaded to Canvas**

Ariarajah, S. Wesley, *Strangers or Co-Pilgrims?* (2017), 33-42 and 227-240.

Aslan, Reza, *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam* (2005), 249-266.

Balmer, Randall, “American Fundamentalism: The Ideal of Femininity,” in John Stratton Hawley (ed.) *Fundamentalism and Gender* (1994), 47-62.

Barbour, John D., “Autobiography,” in Lindsay Jones (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2005), Vol. 2, 697-704.

Brown, Scott, “A Guide to Writing Academic Essays in Religious Studies,” *CSSR Bulletin* 28,3 (1999), 69-76.

Bultmann, Rudolf, “New Testament and Mythology” (1941), in Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, ed. by Schubert Ogden (1984), 1-44.

Coleman, Simon, “Pilgrimage,” in Robert A. Segal (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion* (2009), 385-396.

Cone, James H., *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (2011), Selections.

Cunningham, Lawrence S., “Holy Men/Holy Women,” in Robert A. Segal (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion* (2009), 285-293.

Doorn-Harder, Nelly van, “Gender and Religion: Gender and Islam,” in Lindsay Jones (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2005), Vol. 5, 3364-3371.

Eck, Diana L., *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* (1993), 166-199.

Eliade, Mircea, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1959), Selections.

- Gifford, Paul, "Religious Authority: Scripture, Tradition, Charisma," in John Hinnells (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2010), 397-410.
- Graham, William A., "Scripture," in Lindsay Jones (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2005), Vol. 12, 8194-8205.
- Harris, Sam, *The End of Faith* (2004), 11-49 and 223-227.
- Heim, David, "The Way Open to Other Ways," Interview with Paul Knitter, *The Christian Century* 132:23 (November 11, 2015): 28-31.
- Heiler, Friedrich, *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion* (1932), Selections.
- Hotz, Kendra G., "Ritual Studies," in Paul O. Myhre (ed.), *Introduction to Religious Studies* (2009), 194-209.
- Knight, Michael Muhammad, "I Understand Why Westerners Are Joining Jihadi Movements Like ISIS: I Was Almost One of Them," *Washington Post*, 3 September 2014.
- Knitter, Paul F., *Without Buddha I Could Not be a Christian* (2009), 131-166.
- , and Haight, Roger, *Jesus & Buddha: Friends in Conversation* (2015), Selections.
- MacCulloch, Diarmaid, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (2009), 604-637.
- Majeed, Debra, "How is Religion studied?," in Paul O. Myhre (ed.), *Introduction to Religious Studies* (2009), 15-26.
- Myhre, Paul O., "What Is Religion?," in Paul O. Myhre (ed.), *Introduction to Religious Studies* (2009), 3-14.
- Otto, Rudolf, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational* (orig. 1917, translated by John W. Harvey, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1950), Selections.
- Prothero, Stephen, *God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World* (2010), 1-24, 25-99, 243-278, and 331-340.
- Raphael, Melissa, "Gender and Religion: Gender and Judaism," in Lindsay Jones (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2005), Vol. 5, 3350-3356.
- Ratke, David C., "Origin Stories and Religion: How Are Religions Formed?," in Paul O. Myhre (ed.), *Introduction to Religious Studies* (2009), 27-40.
- Riesebrodt, Martin, *The Promise of Salvation: A Theory of Religion* (2010), 92-121.
- Rosenhagen, Ulrich, "One Abraham or Three? The Conversation Between Three Faiths," *The Christian Century* 132:25 (December 9, 2015): 30-33.
- Sacks, Jonathan, "How to Defeat Religious Violence," *The Wall Street Journal*, 2 October 2015.
- Said, Edward W., "The Clash of Ignorance," *The Nation*, October 22, 2001, 11-13.

Smith, Jane I., *Islam in America* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2009), Selections.

Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2010), 21-64.

Ter Kuile, Casper, *The Power of Ritual*, (2020), Selections.

Turner, Edith, "Pilgrimage," in Lindsay Jones (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2005), Vol. 10, 7145-48.

Turner, Victor W., "Religious Specialists: I. Anthropological Study," in David L. Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 13 (1968), 437-444.

Voorst, Robert E. van, (ed.), *Anthology of World Scriptures: Western Religions* (2007), 1-20.

Wallis, Jim, "America's Original Sin: The Legacy of White Racism", in *CrossCurrents* 57:2 (2007), 197-202.

Wiebe, Donald, "Why the Academic Study of Religion?' Motive and Method in the Study of Religion," *Religious Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1988), 403-413.

### **Class Schedule and Readings**

September 9

#### **Introduction to Class**

- Post your own definition of religion on Canvas Discussions by Sunday, Sept 12 at 11:59 PM.
- Post a 1-2 min introductory video about yourself on Canvas Kaltura by Sept 12 at 11:59 PM (your pronouns, how many years in college?, what do you study?, where are you from?, what do you want to do after college?, what is your favorite book?, your favorite movie? why this book and movie?, do you have hobbies? why did you choose this course?).

September 14

#### **Why Study Religion?**

Watch in class: Stephen Prothero, *The Perils of Religious Ignorance*.

How does Stephen Prothero explain religion? Why is it important to study religion? Think about your own definition of religion. How does it relate to Prothero's definition?

- Send me your three top choices for your presentation by 2:00 PM.
- Watch your classmates' introductory videos before Sept 21.
- I want to get to know you. Make an appointment with me for a 10-15 min conversation over the next ten days. I'll send out a sign-up sheet. If possible, we'll meet at the Mosse Humanities building's courtyard.

September 16

#### **Yom Kippur – No Meeting in Class**

- Do some research on the internet on your own: What is Yom Kippur? How is the day celebrated, and what is its overall meaning? What is its textual basis, and what rituals are performed on Yom Kippur?
- Read the two blog posts by Devorah Fisher and Azariah Horowitz, who used to be Interfaith Fellows at the UW-Madison's Center for Religion and Global Citizenry. What are Devorah's and Azariah's core messages? Are you

sympathetic with their arguments? Would you want to add something to their posts? What do you think about the short guide at the end of Devorah's post?

- <https://ifyc.org/article/public-school-needs-more-religion-not-less>
- <https://religion.wisc.edu/2019/09/30/being-an-ally-to-jewish-students-during-holiday-season-part-ii-devorah-fisher/>
- Write a short (one to two paragraphs) response and post it on Canvas by Sunday, Sept 19, at 11:59 PM.

September 21

### **What is Religion?**

Read: Prothero, *God Is Not One*, 1-24 and 331-340; Myhre, "What Is Religion?," 3-14; Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, 5-7, 12-13, 31-34, 57-59.

September 23

### **How Do We Study Religion?**

Read: Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, 8-11, 60-61; Wiebe, "Why the Academic Study of Religion?," 403-413; Majeed, "How is Religion studied?," 15-26; Cohen, *Abrahamic Religions*, 1-6.

September 28

### **Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: The Essentials**

Read: Prothero, *God Is Not One*, 25-99 and 243-278.

- Three presentations on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Each student needs to show at least one religious object of the religious tradition s/he is presenting.

September 30

### **Sacred Scripture in the Western Religious Traditions**

Read: Graham, "Scripture," 8194-8205; Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*, 1-20.

- Three presentations on the Torah, the New Testament, and the Qur'an.
- Second short response due by Sunday, Oct 3, at 11:59 PM.

October 5

### **Braided Histories I**

Read: Cohen, *Abrahamic Religions*, 7-75. 113-134; Rosenhagen, "One Abraham or Three," 30-33; Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," 11-13.

- Questions for Prof. Cohen are due by Wednesday, Oct 6, at 8:00 PM.

October 7

### **Braided Histories II**

Cohen, *Abrahamic Religions*, 76-112.

- **Class Visit by Prof. emer. Charles L. Cohen**

October 12

### **Introduction to Library Resources at Memorial Library Room # 231**

Brown, "A Guide to Writing Academic Essays in Religious Studies," 69-76 and another short essay on the same topic.

October 14

### **The Protestant Reformation and the Problem of Authority**

Read: MacCulloch, *Christianity*, 604-637; Gifford, "Religious Authority," 397-409.

- Three presentations on Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-1564), and Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900).
- **First paper (3-4 pages; 1200-1600 words):** Write a review of Charles Cohen's book on the Abrahamic Religions. (You may write the essay in the first person if that is easier for you.) Your review needs to summarize Cohen's main arguments, and reflect on the following questions: What does the concept of braided

histories contribute to the study of religion? Can there be a form of braidedness of the Abrahamic traditions with non-Abrahamic traditions? Is there something like an Abrahamic identity? How would have Stephen Prothero and Edward Said reviewed the book?

- **The paper is due at the beginning of class.**

October 19

### **Myth**

Read: Ratke, "Origin Stories," 27-40; Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology*, Selections; Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, Selections.

- Watch short video clips before/during class.
- Third short response due by Sunday, Oct 24, at 11:59 PM.

October 21

### **Ritual**

Read: Hotz, "Ritual Studies," 194-209; Riesebrodt, *Promise*, 92-121; Ter Kuile, *Power of Ritual*, Selections. Maybe one additional short newspaper article.

- Watch short video clips before/during class.
- Two presentations on the Jewish Sabbath and on Christian (Holy) Communion.

October 26

### **Religious Autobiography / Women**

Read: Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 21-61; Barbour, "Autobiography," 697-704; Balmer, "American Fundamentalism," 47-62; Raphael, "Gender and Judaism," 3350-3356.

October 28

### **Memoir (I)**

Read: Ruttenberg, *Surprised by God* (2008)

November 2

### **Holy Men and Women**

Read: Cunningham, "Holy Men/Holy Women," 285-293; Turner, "Religious Specialists," 437-445.

- Three presentations on Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), Julian of Norwich (1343-1417?), and Simone Weil (1909-1943).

November 4

### **Prayer and Silence**

Read: Heiler, *Prayer*, Selections; Gill, "Prayer," 7367-7372; Knitter, *Without Buddha*, 131-166; one more (short) article on prayer.

- One presentation on prayer in Islam.
- **First draft of second paper (6-7 pages, 2400-2800 words):** Please assess Danya Ruttenberg's spiritual memoir *Surprised by God* (2008). What roles do religious rituals, community, spiritual practice, and female (feminist) identity play in her journey? Can her memoir serve as a typical example for young women's spirituality in contemporary America?
- Stay away from anecdotes about your own religious beliefs and from statements of devotion and faith. Write academically! Make sure your paper has a clear argument, title, introduction, and conclusion. Your citations and bibliography need to be in Chicago Style. Please use endnotes when you format your paper.
- **The paper is due at the beginning of class.**
- **Make an appointment with a Writing Fellow.**

- November 9                   **Dialogue Between Religions**  
 Read: Eck, *Encountering God*, 166-199; Ariarajah, *Strangers*, 33-42.
- Watch in class: Jim Wallis, *An Evangelical Christian Looks at Jews and Muslims*.
  - Fourth short response due by Sunday, Nov 14, at 23:59 PM.
  - Questions for Prof. Knitter are due by Wednesday, Nov 10, at 8:00 PM.
- November 11                   **Double Belonging**  
 Read: Heim, "The Way Open to Other Ways;" Knitter/Haight, *Jesus & Buddha*, Selections.
- **Class Visit by Prof. emer. Paul Knitter**
- November 16                   **Memoir (II)**  
 Read: Evans, *Faith Unraveled* (2014).
- November 18                   **Pilgrimage**  
 Read: Coleman, "Pilgrimage," 385-396; Turner, "Pilgrimage," 327-335.
- Two presentations on the Hajj and the Camino de Santiago.
- November 23                   **Race and Religion / Religious Activism**  
 Read: Wallis, "Original Sin," 197-202; Cone, *Cross and Lynching Tree*, Selections. Two short articles on the role of the Black Church and Black Lives Matter.
- Three presentations on Malcolm X (1925-1965), William J. Barber II (\*1963), and Valarie Kaur (\*1981).
  - **Revised paper with comments by Writing Fellow due at the beginning of class.**
- November 25                   **Thanksgiving**
- November 30                   **Memoir (III)**  
 Read: Yousafzai, *I Am Malala* (2013); Doorn-Harder, "Gender and Islam," 3364-3371.
- December 2                   **Islam in America**  
 Read: Smith, *Islam in America*, Selections; Aslan, *No god but God*, 249-266. Two short NYT opinion pieces.
- Watch in class *Little Mosque on the Prairie*.
- December 7                   **Memoir (IV)**  
 Read: Moghul, *How to be a Muslim* (2017).
- December 9                   **Religion and Violence**  
 Read: Michael Muhammad Knight, "I Understand Why Westerners Are Joining Jihadi Movements Like ISIS: I Was Almost One of Them;" Sacks, "How to Defeat Religious Violence;" Harris, *The End of Faith* (2004), 11-49 and 223-227; Ariarajah, *Strangers*, 227-240.
- NPR discussion in class.
- December 11 (Saturday) **First draft of final paper (6-7 pages, 2400-2800 words) is due by 6:00 PM.**

- Analyze and compare two of the memoirs by Malala Yousafzai, Rachel Held Evans, and Haroon Moghul. How would you describe the trajectory of their stories? How are they trying to live their religious identity? What kind of obstacles have they faced? Are these memoirs spiritual biographies? Do these memoirs give the reader a sense of the pressing religious issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
- You need to employ the class readings on (religious) autobiography (Smith and Watson, and Barbour).
- Make sure your paper has a clear argument, title, introduction, and conclusion. Your citations and bibliography need to be in Chicago Style. Please use endnotes when you format your paper.
- Make an appointment with a Writing Fellow.

December 14

**Conclusion**

December 22

**Revised final paper with comments by Writing Fellow due by 6:00 PM.**