

RS 234-001 ([28103](#)) / ILS 234-001 ([28121](#))
Spring, 2020
Course Credits: 3
Tuesday and Thursday 11:00-12:15 PM, SOC SCI 6112
Class email: religst234-1-s20@lists.wisc.edu

Instructor: Dr. Ulrich Rosenhagen
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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, revealed dispatches about a Muslim refugee at Harvard, meditation in public schools, collaborations between nuns & nones, U.S. Jews of color, religious kitsch, the attack on a Hindu priest in NYC, and the deportation of a Lutheran pastor. 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, and identities. “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 approach to religious ideas and their social manifestations has taken hold.

Genres of Western Religious Writing has been developed with this comparative 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, social ethics, 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 West’s” religious economy and imagination.

During the course of the semester we will read religious (or spiritual) memoirs by Barbara Brown Taylor, and Haroon Moghul, and Eboo Patel. 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 (reprehensible) youth and his conversion to Christianity. The memoirs will serve as a playing field to test ideas about socio-religious formations, religious virtuosi, religious pluralism, - activism, and - criticism. We will also examine the concept of ritual and will thoroughly explore the idea of "braided histories of the Abrahamic Traditions." We will have an opportunity to talk about braided histories with Prof. emer. Charles L. Cohen, who recently published his book *The Abrahamic Religions* (2020).

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 hours out of classroom for every class period."

The class won't meet on March 31 and April 2, but instead on Friday, April 3, at 6:00-8:00 at UW-Hillel for an ASM organized interfaith dinner.

Each student is required to give a 8-10 minutes in-class power point presentation on a selected religious topic or thinker. Some bibliographical information will be provided, but students should plan to use the library resources to prepare for their presentation. Each presentation needs to be emailed to the instructor no later than 10:00 PM the day before the presentation. Presentations usually end with three questions for classroom 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.

The learning goals of this course align with the learning outcome goals of the Religious Studies Program, especially goals 1 ("close reading, interpretation, and written and oral analysis") and 3 ("categorizing, analyzing, and comparing diverse systems of value and belief in a variety of contexts").

Students are expected to follow the University of Wisconsin-Madison Academic Honor Code.

Students with disabilities: Please notify me early in the semester if you have a requirement for accommodation in this course. If you have any questions about this, or require any assistance, please contact me or the McBurney Disability Resource Center at 263-2741.

Grading will be determined as follows:

Discussion/participation/attendance = 20%

One 8-10 minutes oral presentation in class = 15%

One short paper (2-3 pages; about 720-1080 words) = 10%

One medium paper (3-4 pages; about 1080-1500 words) = 15%

Two larger papers (6-7 pages; [***Pre-Med students may write their final paper as a 8-10 pages one as required for application to Med School**] about 2,200-2,600 [2,900-3,700] words; each = 20%) = 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%.

Books That Need to be Purchased

Brown Taylor, Barbara, *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith* (2006).

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

Heschel, Abraham Joshua, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (orig. 1951, new edition with an introduction by Susannah Heschel, 2005).

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

Patel, Eboo, *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, The Struggle for the Soul of a Generation* (orig. 2007, 2nd ed. 2010).

Wuthnow, Robert, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (1998).

The Following Readings Will Be Uploaded to Canvas

Alles, Greg, "Otto, Rudolf," in Lindsay Jones (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2nd ed. 2005), Vol. 6: 6928-31.

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

Barbour, John D., "Autobiography," in Lindsay Jones (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2nd ed. 2005), Vol. 2, 697-704.

Bell, Catherine, "Ritual," in Robert A. Segal (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion* (2009), 397-412.

Bhattacharyya, Swasti, "Social Activism and Engagement," in Paul O. Myhre (ed.). *Introduction to Religious Studies* (2009), 115-134.

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.

Campbell, Joseph, "Myth and the Modern World," in Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (1988), 1-43.

Chidester, David, "Jonestown and Peoples Temple," in Lindsay Jones (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (2nd 2005), Vol. 7, 4952-56.

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

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

- Diamant, Anita and Howard Cooper, *Living a Jewish Life* (1991), 33-67.
- Eck, Diana L., *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* (1993), 166-199.
- Eliade, Mircea, Selections from *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1959).
- Ghaneabassiri, Kambiz, *A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order* (2010), 327-381
- Gifford, Paul, "Religious Authority: Scripture, Tradition, Charisma," in John Hinnells (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (2nd ed. 2010), 397-410.
- Graham, William A., "Scripture," in Lindsay Jones (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (2nd ed. 2005), Vol. 12, 8194-8205.
- Harris, Sam, *The End of Faith* (2004), 11-49 and 223-227.
- Heiler, Friedrich, Selections from *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion* (1932).
- 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.
- Livingston, James C., *Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion* (6th ed. 2009), 124-149.
- MacCulloch, Diarmaid, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (2009), 604-637.
- Meier, Barry, "Inside a Secretive Group Where Women Are Branded," *The New York Times*, October 17, 2017.
- Myhre, Paul O., "What Is Religion?," in Paul O. Myhre (ed.), *Introduction to Religious Studies* (2009), 3-14.
- Otto, Rudolf, Selections from *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, 2nd ed. 1950).
- Prothero, Stephen, *God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run The World* (2010), 1-24, 25-99, 243-278, and 331-340.
- Ratke, David C., "Origin Stories and Religion: How Are Religions Formed?," in Paul O. Myhre (ed.), *Introduction to Religious Studies* (2009), 27-40.
- 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.

Smietana, Bob, "Apocalypse Meow: How a Cult That Believes Cats Are Divine Beings Ended Up in Tennessee," *Nashville Scene*, 8 September 2016.

Smith, Jane I., *Islam in America* (2nd ed., 2009).

Turner, Edith, "Pilgrimage," in Lindsay Jones (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (2nd 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.

-----, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*," in Victor W. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1967), 93-111.

Van Gennep, Arnold, Selections from *The Rites of Passage* (orig. 1909; 1960).

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

Whedon, Sarah W. "Women," in Richard D. Hecht and Vincent F. Biondi III (eds.), *Religion and Culture: Contemporary Practices and Perspectives* (2012), 93-111.

Class Schedule and Readings

January 21	Introduction to Class
January 23	Why Study Religion? (Watch: Stephen Prothero: <i>The Perils of Religious Ignorance</i>).
January 28	What is Religion? Read: Prothero, <i>God Is Not One</i> , 1-24 and 331-340; Myhre, "What Is Religion?," 3-14; Brown, "A Guide to Writing Academic Essays in Religious Studies," 69-76.
January 30	The Numinous (and "the West") Read: Otto, <i>The Idea of the Holy</i> , ix- xix, 1-21, 31-39, 57-61, 65-71, 156-158, 162, 172-173; Alles, "Otto, Rudolf," 6928-31; Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," 11-13. Cohen, <i>Abrahamic Religions</i> , 1-6.
February 4	Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: The Essentials Read: Prothero, <i>God Is Not One</i> , 25-99 and 243-278. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Three in-class presentations on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Each student needs to bring one religious object of the religious tradition s/he is presenting on.
February 6	Sacred Scripture in the Western Religious Traditions Read: Graham, "Scripture," 8194-8205.; Van Voorst, <i>Anthology of World Scriptures</i> , 1-20. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Three in-class presentations on the Torah, the New Testament, and the Qur'an.

- February 11 **Braided Histories I**
Read: Cohen, *Abrahamic Religions*, 7-92. 131-134.
- February 13 **Braided Histories II**
Cohen, *Abrahamic Religions*, 93-130
Class Visit by Prof. emer. Charles L. Cohen
- February 18 **The Protestant Reformation and the Problem of Authority**
Read: MacCulloch, *Christianity*, 604-637; Gifford, "Religious Authority," 397-409.
- Three in-class presentations on Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-1564), and Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900)
- ➔ First paper (3-4 pages; 1080-1500 words): Write a review of Charles Cohen's book on the Abrahamic Religions from the perspective of Stephen Prothero. Your book review needs to summarize their different arguments, and reflect on questions like: What can 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 that identity coexist alongside a Christian, Jewish, or Muslim religious identity?
- ➔ The paper is due at the beginning of class.
- February 20 **Myth**
Read: Ratke, "Origin Stories," 27-40; Bultmann, Selections from *New Testament and Mythology*; Eliade, Selections from *The Sacred and the Profane*, Campbell, "Myth and the Modern World," 1-43.
- February 25 **Ritual**
Read: Van Gennep, Selections from *The Rites of Passage*; Turner, "Betwixt and Between," 93-111; Hotz, "Ritual Studies," 194-209; Bell, "Ritual," 397-412.
- February 27 **Sabbath**
Read: Heschel, *The Sabbath* (1951); Diamant and Cooper, *Jewish Life* (1991), 33-67.
- Two in-class presentations on the Jewish Sabbath and on Christian (Holy) Communion.
- March 3 **Prayer and Silence**
Read: Selections from Heiler, *Prayer*; Gill, "Prayer," 7367-7372; Knitter, *Without Buddha*, 131-166. Otto, *Idea of the Holy* ("Silent Worship"), 210-214.
- One in-class presentation on prayer in Islam.
- ➔ First draft of second paper (6-7 pages): Please examine Heschel's main argument(s) of his book *The Sabbath*. Does his argument(s) still hold today?
- ➔ Please also assess the concepts of myth and ritual according to David Ratke and Kendra Hotz. How are these concepts incorporated in *The Sabbath*?
- ➔ 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.

<https://researchguides.library.wisc.edu/c.php?g=177820&p=1170615>

https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html

- ➔ The paper is due at the beginning of class.
- ➔ Make an appointment with a writing fellow.

March 5 **Holy Men and Women**
Read: Cunningham, “Holy Men/Holy Women,” 285-293; Turner, “Religious Specialists,” 437-445.

- Three in-class presentations on Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), and Thomas Merton (1915-1968).

March 10 **Dialogue Between Religions**
Read: Eck, *Encountering God*, 166-199.
(Watch: Jim Wallis, *An Evangelical Christian Looks at Jews and Muslims*).

March 12 **Communities and Cults**
Read: Livingston, *Society and the Sacred*, 124-149; Smietana, “Apocalypse Meow;” Meier, “Inside a Secretive Group Where Women Are Branded;” Chidester, “Jonestown and Peoples Temple,” 4952-56.

SPRING BREAK (March 14 to 22)

March 24 **Memoir I**
Read: Brown Taylor, *Leaving Church*; Whedon, “Women,” 93-111.

- ➔ Revised paper with comments by writing fellow due at beginning of class.

March 26 **Pilgrimage I**
Read: Coleman, “Pilgrimage,” 385-396; Turner, “Pilgrimage,” 7145-48.

- Two in-class presentations on the Hajj and on Aliyah.

March 31 **No Class**

April 2 **No Class**

April 3 (Friday!) **Interfaith Dinner** at UW-Hillel organized by ASM (in cooperation with the CRGC, Hillel, and other campus groups), 6:00-8:00 PM. Mandatory attendance. Opportunity for extra credit.

April 7 **Dwelling and Seeking**
Read: Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 1-84. 142-198.

April 9 **Pilgrimage II**
Documentary: *Walking the Camino* (2013).

April 14

Memoir II

Read: Patel, *Acts of Faith* (2006); Barbour, "Autobiography," 697-704.

- ➔ Third paper (2-3 pages): How would you explain the attraction of the concept of pilgrimage in the 21st century? Please use Wuthnow's concepts of dwelling and seeking for your argument.
- ➔ The paper is due at the beginning of class.

April 16

From the Social Prophets to Social Activism

Read: Bhattacharyya, "Social Activism and Engagement," 115-134.

- Three in-class presentations on Dorothy Day (1897-1980), Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968), and Malcolm X (1925-1965).

April 21

Islam in America

Read: Ghaneabassiri, *History of Islam in America*, 327-381; Selections from Smith, *Islam in America*; Aslan, *No god but God*, 249-266.

April 23

Memoir (III)

Read: Moghul, *How to be a Muslim* (2017)

April 28

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.

- ➔ First draft of final paper (6-7 pages): Analyze and compare the memoirs by Haroon Moghul and Eboo Patel. How would you describe the trajectory of their stories? How are they trying to live their religious identity in present-day America? What kind of obstacles have they faced? Are these memoirs spiritual biographies? Would you agree with Patel's statement that not race, but faith is the most dividing issue of the America of the 21st century? How do Patel's and Moghul's memoirs relate to a "practice-oriented spirituality" (Wuthnow) and Cohen's concept of braided Abrahamic traditions?
- ➔ 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.

April 30

Conclusion

- ➔ Revised final paper with comments by writing fellow due by Monday, May 11, 6:00 PM in my mailbox - # 5010 in the Mosse Humanities building.