



WHAT'S GOD GOT TO DO WITH IT?

introduction to the study of religion

Prof. Megan Goodwin
Syracuse University
Fall 2016

REQUIRED TEXT

Nye, *Religion: The Basics* (2nd ed.)

All other readings will be available on Blackboard.



WHY STUDY RELIGION?

This course will introduce you to the academic study of religion -- scholarly engagement with practices, communities, texts, beliefs, and commitments.

We will focus on three course commitments: understanding religion's multiple meanings, exploring how people live their religions, and analyzing how creativity and conflict help us better understand this phenomenon.

These discussions will help you to:

- develop a nuanced understanding of the ways religion shapes and is shaped by culture(s)
- apply core concepts in humanities scholarship to the study of religion
- critically engage scholarly and confessional sources, including sermons, interviews, creative nonfiction, poetry, and sacred literature

CLASS FORMAT

Each class will include lecture and discussion elements. Some will include films or student presentations as well. None of these work unless you **attend regularly and read the assignments carefully**. Please come to class ready to analyze and respond to the readings, as well we to the contributions of your fellow students. Bring the readings to class with you, and remember that active engagement includes attentive listening as well as thoughtful speaking.

EXPECTATIONS

This is an introductory course. I do not expect that you will know anything about religious studies. If you are unfamiliar with humanities scholarship—particularly reading and analyzing scholarly articles or writing in standard humanities styles—you might find some course assignments challenging. Please be sure to read directions closely and seek additional assistance as needed well in advance of deadlines. Regardless of your academic background, **treat every student and every concept you encounter with scholarly respect.**

Challenge your assumptions and position(s) of privilege. Speak from your own experiences and understandings of the issues, and assume that each class member operates from his or her own best intentions. As scholars of religion, **it is not our job to evaluate the truth or validity of any tradition.** We only scrutinize the evidence we have, so we might position that tradition's beliefs, practices, teachings, and products in the broader context of religion(s) and culture(s).



I am committed to making our classroom and our campus an inclusive and supportive learning environment for people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions of embodiment.



Sex and gender-based violence and harassment are Civil Rights offenses. Offenders are subject to the same kinds of penalties applied to offenses against other protected categories (such as race, national origin, etc.). **Survivors are entitled to confidential support.**

If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, Syracuse wants to help. **[Here are our resources.](#)**

MINIMAL

ADEQUATE

GOOD

EXCELLENT

You usually make a single comment during discussions in response to another student's observations or insights. ("I agree with them.")

You're present and prepared, but limit your contributions to several surface-level observations or clarifying questions about lectures or readings.

You're present and prepared, and you offer thoughtful questions and comments that demonstrate your preparation for discussion and attention to readings and lectures.

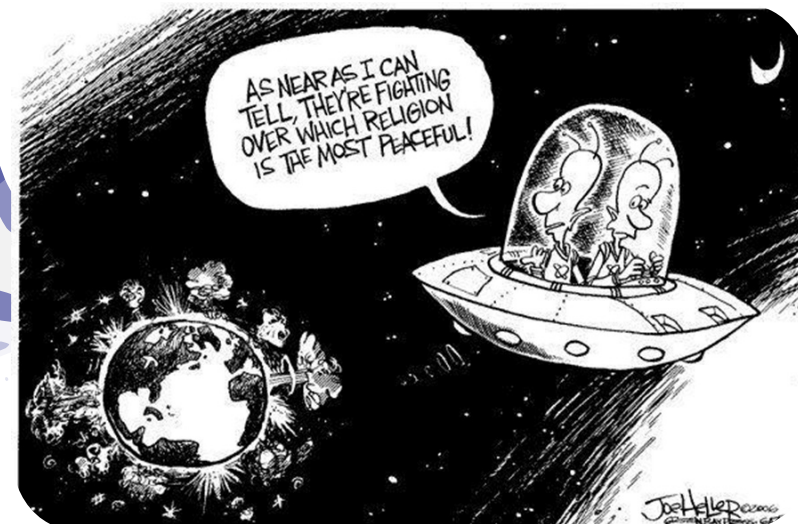
You're present, prepared, and engaged. You refer consistently to the readings, lectures, and previous class discussions. You encourage other students' comments and questions in a productive and respectful manner.

PARTICIPATION

*Attendance isn't enough.
To succeed, engage
fully in activities
and discussions.
In short: SPEAK UP!*

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance is mandatory.
Take your coursework seriously.
**You are permitted two absences
(no excuses necessary).**
After that, you lose a letter grade for
every class meeting missed,
barring a documented emergency.



GRADING

In this course, you will be graded on how you think, not what you think. In other words, you will not be graded on your beliefs, opinions, or the positions you advance. I evaluate how well you articulate your thoughts and positions, how closely you read the assigned texts, and how much your ability to think critically and synthetically about course themes develops throughout the semester.

- 10% Attendance
- 10% Participation
- 5% Religion in the News (twitter)
- 10% Film Analyses (twitter)
- 15% Keyword Interview (skype)
- 15% Exam 1
- 15% Exam 2
- 20% Final Exam (cumulative)



If you need in-class or testing accommodations, if you have emergency medical information, or if you need special arrangements in the event of a building evacuation, please inform me as soon as possible. Students who require test accommodations must **pre-register** with the **Office of Disability Services** and inform me of these accommodations during the **first week of class**. You are responsible for making timely arrangements with ODS and me regarding your testing accommodations. **Please note: you may not use your own computer for test-taking.**



TECHNOLOGY

Unless you have learning accommodations that require their use, **laptops and other devices are only permissible in the classroom for specific class activities.** You are also required to use certain technologies to complete your assignments (specifically Twitter). You must also know how to create a PDF document and submit it via Blackboard in a timely manner. You are responsible for learning how to negotiate these technologies.

I only accept electronic submissions in PDF format, and only via Blackboard. I will not accept assignments as

*.doc or *.docx files or assignments sent to my email address.



CHEATING

Cheating or plagiarism = failing this course. Please don't. You plagiarize when you present someone else's thoughts, words, or ideas as your own without proper attribution. You must complete this plagiarism tutorial and submit a passing certificate before 6 September if you intend to remain in the course. If you're still unclear about what constitutes plagiarism, please consult the "What is Plagiarism?" handout available on Blackboard or Syracuse's Academic Integrity Policy. "I didn't know" is not a valid excuse. Go Know.

ASSIGNMENTS

film analyses

Twice this semester, we will watch films in class. During these screenings, you should provide brief commentary on how our readings and discussions have shaped your viewing practices. Live-tweet these observations to #SyrRel120.

You must produce at least 10 tweets per film.

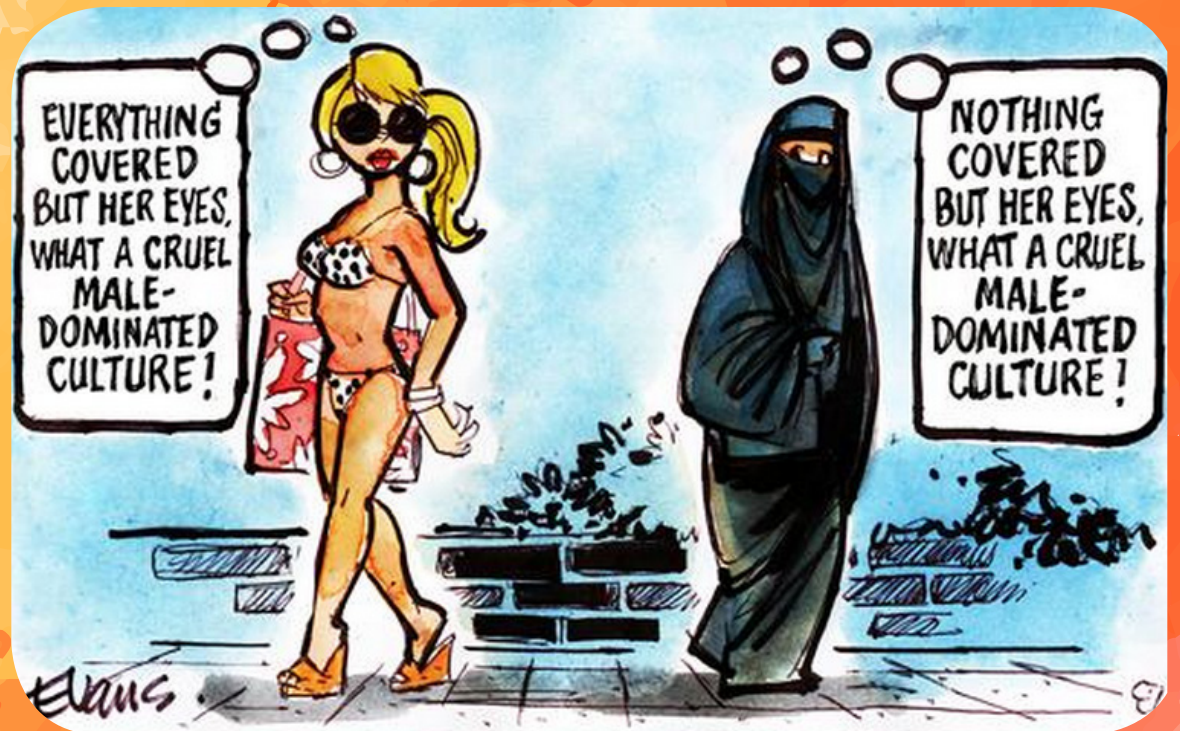
religion in the news

Five times this semester, share a news story pertinent to our discussions to #SyrRel120.

Be sure to include a brief analysis and relate it to one or more #keyword(s)!

Keyword interview

Ten scholars will Skype into our discussions this semester to share their reflections on our keywords and how these concepts shape their own research. Choose one scholar with whom you'd like to engage directly. Review the day's readings carefully, and prepare three questions for our discussion. Your questions should refer directly to course readings. Submit these questions via Blackboard by 11:59pm the day before the discussion in question.



SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Assignment</i>
T 30 August	Introductions	
<i>UNIT 1: DEFINING RELIGION</i>		
R 1 September	Religion	Nye, "Religion: Some Basics"
T 6 September		Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious" Albanese, "Elephant in the Dark"
R 8 September	Culture	Nye, "Culture"
T 13 September		Masuzawa, "Culture"
R 15 September	Ritual	Nye, "Ritual"
T 20 September		Wenger, "We Are Guaranteed Freedom" Keywords in Action: Prof. Brandi Denison, University of North Florida
R 22 September	Belief	Nye, "Belief" Orsi, "Belief" Keywords in Action: Michelle Wolff, Duke University
T 27 September		Power
R 29 September	Asad, "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category" Erickson, "Falling in Love with the Earth" Keywords in Action: Prof. Jacob Erickson, Trinity College	

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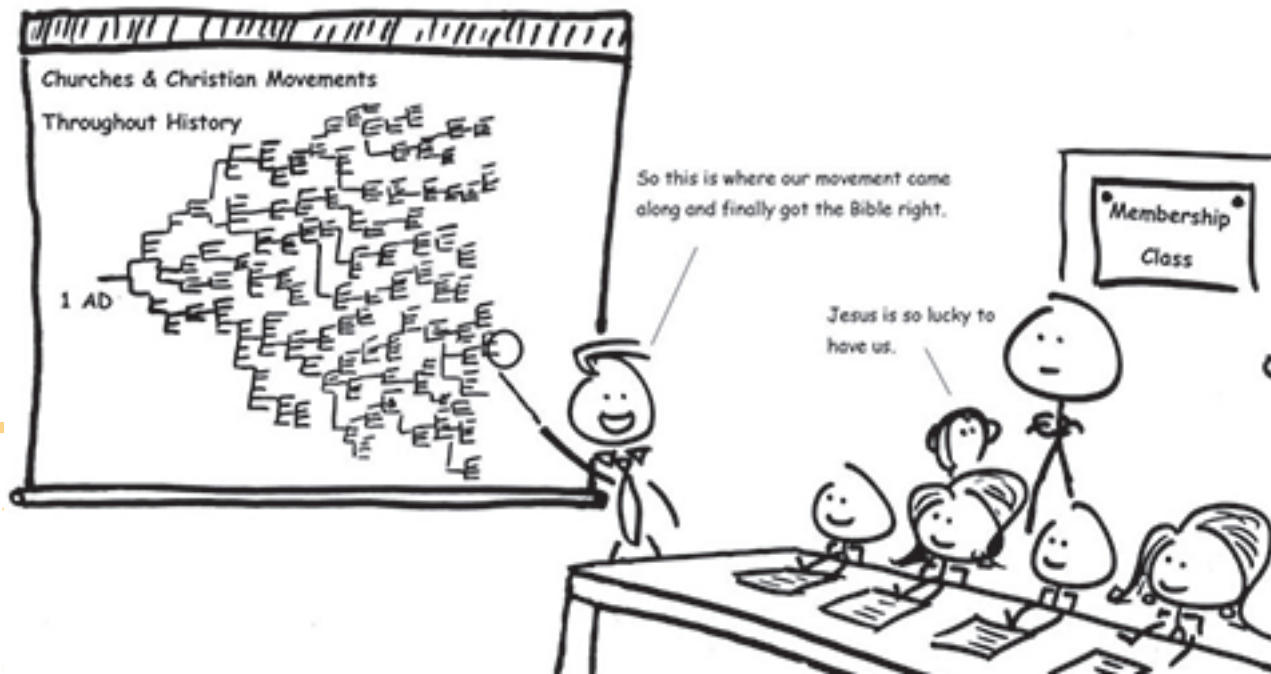
<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Assignment</i>
T 4 October	Exam Review	
R 6 October	Exam 1	
T 11 October	Space/Place	Tweed, "Space" McTighe, "Front Porch Strategy: Sacred Space and Demonic Grounds" Keywords in Action: Laura McTighe, Columbia University
R 13 October	Text	Nye, "Text" Walker, from <i>In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens</i> Keywords in Action: Prof. Nyasha Junior, Temple University
<i>UNIT 2: LIVING RELIGION</i>		
T 18 October	Gender	Nye, "Gender" Fulkerson, "Gender: Being It Or Doing It?"
R 20 October		SCREENING: <i>Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer</i>
T 25 October	Race	Scalzi, "Straight White Male" McKenzie and Song, "How to Be a 'Reverse Racist'" Sagarena, "Race"
R 27 October		Baldwin, "Letter from a Region in My Mind" Keywords in Action: Prof. Jamil Drake, Florida State University
T 1 November	Sexuality	Goodwin, "Thinking Sex and American Religions"

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Assignment</i>
R 3 November	Class	McCloud, "Putting Some Class into Religious Studies" Chavez, "The Mexican American and the Church" Crosley-Corcoran, "Explaining White Privilege to a Broke White Person" Keywords in Action: Prof. Sean McCloud, UNC Charlotte
T 8 November	Exam Review	
R 10 November	Exam 2	
<i>UNIT 3: ANALYZING RELIGION</i>		
T 15 November	Pluralism & Privilege	Prothero, from <i>God is Not One</i> Killerman, from <i>The Social Justice Advocate's Handbook</i>
R 17 November	SCREENING: <i>God? The Almighty Question</i> (must be viewed in class)	
T 22 November	No class	
R 24 November		
T 29 November	In/Tolerance	Corrigan and Neal, from <i>Religious Intolerance</i> Baker, "Make America White Again?" Keywords in Action: Dr. Kelly Baker
R 1 December	Violence & Conflict	Juergensmeyer, Kitts, and Jerryson, "Introduction" Aslan, "Cosmic War in Religious Traditions" Keywords in Action: Prof. Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, University of VT

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Assignment</i>
T 6 December	Innovation	Cusak, "Imagination, Fiction, and Faith" BBC, "Australians Asked Not to List Their Religion as Jedi" Chicago Tribune, "An After School Satan Club" Keywords in Action: Shannon Schorey, UNC Chapel Hill
R 8 December	Conclusions	Nye, "Contemporary Religions, Contemporary Cultures"
F 16 December 5:15 - 7:15pm	Final Exam (cumulative)	



IMPORTANT DATES

6 October	Exam 1
10 November	Exam 2
16 December	Exam 3

20 October	Screening: <i>Pussy Riot</i>
17 November	Screening: <i>God?</i>

20 September	Interview: Denison
22 September	Interview: Wolff
29 September	Interview: Erickson
11 October	Interview: McTighe
13 October	Interview: Junior
27 October	Interview: Drake
3 November	Interview: McCloud
29 November	Interview: Baker
1 December	Interview: Morgenstein Fuerst
6 December	Interview: Schorey

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INSTRUCTOR
INFO

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