

PROPHETS, PRIESTS, & SORCERERS

Fall 2022

Instructor: Dr. Abby Kulisz

Email: TBA

Lecture: Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday
3:30-4:30pm

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Office Hours: TBA

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Course Description

Biblical literature abounds with stories of prophets, priests, and sorcerers. From leaders who predict an impending end of the world to mysterious seers who practice magic, ancient texts often center on these captivating figures. This course will explore how prophets and other authoritative figures are portrayed in biblical literature (i.e., Jewish, Christian, and Islamic scriptures and related texts).

In our reading of these sources, we will ask how ancient texts understand religious authority—who gets to speak for God and why? Do prophets have special personality traits or "charisma"? Are women authorities depicted differently than men? What role does gender and race play in the shaping of religious authority? We will also look at contemporary figures and movements who see themselves as having special access to divine knowledge. Are so-called "cult leaders" also "religious authorities"? In addition to reading primary sources, we will explore contemporary films, music, podcasts, and social media.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- Develop a broad understanding of how authority and authenticity are depicted in ancient literature
- Analyze ancient texts using textual analysis and scholarly interpretative methods with a critical eye toward representations of race, gender, and sexuality
- Analyze Jewish, Christian, and Islamic sources in comparative perspective by understanding both similarities and differences in their respective textual traditions
- Develop a broad understanding of the academic study of religion through analysis of written and visual sources
- Evaluate ancient sources in tandem with contemporary sources and consider how studying antiquity can help inform the present (and vice versa)
- Improve your critical thinking skills by applying and synthesizing information and concepts in different contexts

Required Materials and Texts

- One pack of notecards
- Access to English translations of the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Qur'an (different options for reading and accessing these texts will be discussed in class during the first week)
- Access to course readings, films, and other media available via Avenue

Course Evaluation – Overview

- Attendance (20%)

- Participation (20%)
- Short Essay (10%)
- Film Analysis (20%)
- Prophet Project (30%)

Course Evaluation – Details

- **Attendance (ongoing):** As we learn together and through each other's questions and comments, your attendance is required. You are expected to complete the readings and consult the recommended websites ahead of time to be adequately prepared.

At the beginning of each class, you will hand in three questions/comments on a notecard that pertain to the assigned reading. It is important that you use parenthetical citations to cite the passage or issue that pertains to your question/comment, e.g., (Smith, xii). Examples will be shown during the first week.

- **Participation (#1 due Oct. 3; #2 due Nov. 11):** At two points throughout the semester, you'll respond to a prompt that will ask you to self-assess your participation in the course. You will discuss what you've learned, what questions you have, what you've done to prepare for and engage with the course material and how you have contributed to our classroom discussions. Please see "participation handout" for further guidelines.
- **Short Essay (due Sept. 28):** You will submit a 600-800 word essay that responds to a prompt pertaining to the course readings. Please see "short essay handout" for further instructions and citation information.
- **Film Analysis (due Oct. 21st):** You will have your choice between two films (*The Sacrament* or *Jesus Camp*) that you will view on your own and write a 600-800 word analysis of how your film depicts religious authority, authenticity, and charisma. You will be required to connect the film to at least one of our ancient texts and describe how the film helps to illuminate, clarify, and/or challenge an aspect of the text. Please see "film analysis handout" for further guidelines and citation information. Films will be made available for viewing by the instructor.
- **Prophet Project (Open-ended format, due Dec. 5 with proposal and outline due earlier in semester):** In this final project, you will analyze a contemporary or historical person, movement, entity, or concept through the lens of prophecy, charisma, and/or authenticity. It is important that the person, movement, etc. that you select is *not obvious* (e.g., scientology does not qualify as a movement to analyze because it is already commonly treated as a "cult"). You must engage with two sources from class (at least one must be one of our ancient sources)

and two sources from your own research. Your preliminary idea must be approved by me ahead of time. The format for this final project is open-ended and may take the form of a traditional essay, podcast, or art project. See “prophet project handout” for guidelines, format suggestions, and due dates for project approval and preliminary outlines. You will present your final project during the last week of class.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1: Introduction to the Course and the Academic Study of Religion

September 6:

- ✚ Introduction to the Class: Defining Terms and Requirements

September 7:

Readings:

- ✚ “Why Study Religion?” *The Routledge Companion*, edited by John R. Hinnells (New York: Routledge, 2005), 5-21
- ✚ Religion for Breakfast: “The Academic Study of Religion Explained”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VAx4jZbBr8>

September 9:

Readings:

- ✚ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), xi-xiii.
- ✚ Sam Gill, “The Academic Study of Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LXII (4): 965-975

Week 2: Charisma and Authenticity

September 13:

Readings:

- ✚ “What’s the deal with WitchTok? We spoke to creators bringing magic to TikTok” <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/2021/10/14/tiktok-wichtok-has-billions-views-witches-explain-why/6102147001/>
- ✚ Max Weber, “The Pure Types of Legitimate Authority,” in Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 46-77

September 14:

Readings:

✚ David Chidester, *Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2005), 1-10.

✚ "Children of Scientology: Life After Growing Up in an Alleged Cult"
<https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/scientology-children-second-generation-846732/>

September 16:

Readings:

✚ Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2011), 51-62.

✚ Gospel of Mark 16:15-20

Week 3: The Problem of History: The Historical Jesus

September 20:

Readings:

✚ Gospel of Mark (read all)

✚ Three Little Pigs handout

September 21:

Readings:

✚ J.P. Meier, "How Do We Decide What Comes from Jesus?" (see handout)

✚ *Noli Me Tangere* (digital art and reflection gallery; please choose three items to view/read) <https://touchmenot.indiana.edu/index.html>

✚ John 20:11-18

September 23:

Readings:

✚ Geza Vermes, "Jesus and Charismatic Judaism" (see handout)

Week 4: Feminist Approaches & Queering History

September 27:

Readings:

✚ Gospel of Thomas (see handout)

September 28:

Readings:

✚ Mary Rose D'Angelo, "I Have Seen the Lord': Mary Magdalen as Visionary, Early Christian Prophecy and the Context of John 20:14-18." In

Mariam, the Magdalen and the Mother, edited by Deirdre Good, 95-122. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.

- ✚ Elizabeth Castelli, "I Will Make Mary Male': Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity." In *Bodyguards: The Cultural Contexts of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub, 29-49. New York: Routledge, 1991.

September 30: No Class

Week 5: Case Study #1: Moses

October 4:

Readings:

- ✚ Exodus 1-19; 32-34
- ✚ Numbers 10:29-14; 20-21; 31
- ✚ Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* (Vintage Books, 1967), 1-11.

October 5:

Readings:

- ✚ Deuteronomy 1-3, 31-34
- ✚ Qur'an 4:164; 20:12-13; 20:43-44; 7:143
- ✚ Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* (Vintage Books, 1967), 20-42.

October 7:

Readings:

- ✚ Zora Neal Hurston, *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (see Avenue for selection)

Week 6: No Classes

Week 7: Case Study #2: Jezebel

October 18:

Readings:

- ✚ 1 Kings 16-17; 18:19-19:3; 21:5-16

October 19:

Readings:

- ✚ Revelation 2:20

- ✚ Janet S. Everhart, "Jezebel: Framed by Eunuchs?" *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* Vol. 72, No. 4 (2010): 688-698

October 21:

Readings:

- ✚ S. Jonathon O'Donnell, "Jezebel Assemblages: Witchcraft, Queerness, Transnationality." In *Passing Orders* (New York: Fordham University Press), 52-79.

Week 8: Case Study #3: Paul

October 24

Readings:

- ✚ Acts 9:3-9
- ✚ Galatians

October 26

Readings:

- ✚ 1 Corinthians
- ✚ 'Abd al-Jabbār, *The Critique of Christian Origins*, trans. by Gabriel Said Reynolds (section on Paul)

October 27

Readings:

- ✚ Joseph A. Marchal "Female Masculinity in Corinth? Bodily Citations and the Drag of History" *Neotestamentica* Vol. 48, No. 1 (2014): 93-113.

Week 9: Case Study #4: Mary

November 1

Readings:

- ✚ Luke 1:27–2:34
- ✚ John 2:1–12
- ✚ John 19:25–26

November 2

Readings:

- ✚ Quran 3:42, 47; 19:16-21

November 4

Readings:

- + Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Y. Haddad, "The Virgin Mary in Islamic Tradition and Commentary." *Muslim World* 79.3–4 (1989): 161–187

Week 10: Case Study #5: Muhammad

November 8

Readings:

- + Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* (selections)
- + Kecia Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), selections

November 9

Readings:

- + Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* (selections, continued)
- + Ruqayya Khan, "Did a Woman Edit the Qur'an? Hafsa and Her 'Famed Codex,'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 82, No. 1 (2014): 174-216

November 11

Readings:

- + Al-Tabari, *History of Prophets and Kings* (selections)

Week 11: Cults, Minority Religions, & Neoliberal Prophets (pt. I)

November 15

Readings:

- + Podcast: Keeping It 101 (A Killjoy's Introduction to Religion Podcast), "What are 'cults'? Why do we hate that word so much"
<https://keepingit101.com/smartgrrlsummer1>
- + Pliny to the Emperor Trajan (*Letters* 10.96-97)

November 16

Readings:

- + Andrea Jain, *Selling Yoga: From Counterculture to Pop Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), selections
- + MLMs and religion?
<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rolltodisbelieve/2018/02/28/overlapping-venn-diagram-christianity-mlm/>

November 18

Readings:

- ✚ Watch: *LuLaRich*, episode one only (access to series provided by instructor)

Week 12: Cults, Minority Religions, & Neoliberal Prophets (pt. II)

November 22

Readings:

- ✚ David Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate: Rumors of Demonic Conspiracy and Satanic Abuse in History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), selections

November 23

Readings:

- ✚ David Thibodeau, *A Place Called Waco* (selections)

November 25

- ✚ Presentations

Week 13: Presentations

Week 14: Buffer Week

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

All assignments must be submitted through Avenue as a .doc, .docx, or .pdf file. Assignments submitted as email attachments will not be graded.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-89	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-

MARK	GRADE
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Late Assignments

It is important that you turn in all assignments in on time to avoid falling behind. Late assignments will receive a two-point deduction for each late day and will not be accepted after one week past the deadline. If you are having difficulty keeping up with assignments, please let me know immediately.

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

University Policies

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Authenticity / Plagiarism Detection

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software.

All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Courses with an On-line Element

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used.

Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Online Proctoring

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the "Code"). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains

in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students' access to these platforms.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University's [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work

[McMaster Student Absence Form \(MSAF\)](#): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar "Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work".

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the

class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.