

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 2RN3 RELIGION IN THE NEWS 2020 Spring/Summer--DRAFT

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Lecture: Online

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Course Description

An examination of a variety of topical religious issues covered in the Canadian and global news media, to cultivate awareness of key historical, cultural, and social contexts framing these issues.

This course is divided into two themes. The first theme is a historical case study of news media. We will explore depictions of new religious movements (or fringe groups, or minority faiths) in North American mass media from the 1950s to 1990s. Under this theme, we will trace mid- to late-twentieth-century reporting on new religious movements and consider a range of questions. How have magazine depictions of religious centre and periphery changed since the 1950s? Why did writers, journalists, and editors consistently represent the fringe in certain ways? Who decides what is a fringe religion and what is mainstream? The second theme is contemporary religious issues in the news. Within this theme, we will investigate a number of current issues in Canadian and global news, such as pandemics, reproductive rights, land rights, and climate change, and how these issues connect to religious traditions and frameworks.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Examine and understand print media depictions of the American religious fringe
- Gain an awareness of the power of images and words to uphold or subvert social and cultural hierarchies
- Critically analyze scholarly sources that discuss media, journalism, and religion
- Develop a critical ability to identify and understand the significance of religion in contemporary news
- Critically evaluate news items and social media posts about religion
- Engage in debates and discussions about religion in the news

Required Materials and Texts

- Sean McCloud, *Making the American Religious Fringe: Exotics, Subversives, & Journalists, 1955-1993*
- Additional readings will be made available by the instructor

Class Format

Online

Course Evaluation – Overview

1. Discussion Forums – 25%
2. Group Seminar – 40%
3. Final Exam – 35%

Course Evaluation – Details

Discussion Forums (25%)

Students will be graded based on their participation on the Avenue discussion boards. You will find 2 discussion questions every week. These questions relate to course readings, lectures, and current events. Each week, you are expected to contribute an initial post to each of the 2 questions and then comment on the answers of other students in your group. In addition to your 2 initial posts, you are required to respond at least twice per discussion question. That means you should be posting a minimum of six (6) times each week (3 posts, one initial and 2 replies, per discussion question).

You are expected to post thoughtful answers to each question. Your answers should be insightful and include reference to the course material. Your language should be conversational yet professional. You are welcome to agree or disagree with other students, but you must elaborate on your view and your comments to others should be constructive.

Initial posts are due on Wednesdays. Responses are due on Fridays.

Group Seminar (40%)

As part of a group, you will design a virtual group seminar based on a selected contemporary religious issue in the news.

Select group and topic, due 26 June

Proposal, due 3 July. In a formal proposal, summarize your topic and outline a plan for the successful completion of the assignment. Specifically outline each group members' roles and responsibilities. In addition, select three news media that discuss your topic/issue that you want the rest of the class to read. This includes print media, broadcast news, and the Internet. Keep in mind: how does this specific issue connect to religious traditions and frameworks? How does news media present the issue?

Presentation, due 10 July. Design a virtual presentation document (ex. PowerPoint) that summarizes your selected contemporary religious issue in the news. Your presentation must feature an engagement with the news media readings you assigned in the Proposal. Your presentation must also include two thoughtful, well-crafted discussion questions (these will be shared with the class and used in the discussion forums). The goals of your presentation are to introduce the class to your topic/issue and facilitate discussion with your classmates.

Final Exam (35%), 6-9 August

Take-home exam (cumulative)

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 (22 - 28 June)

Theme 1: The American Religious Fringe and Journalism, 1955-1993

Module 1: Cold War Journalism, 1955-1965

Reading: McCloud, "Introduction," 1-22.

McCloud, "Exoticism and the Dangers of Religious Zeal," 25-54.

Notes: Discussion Forums, initial posts due 24 June, replies due 26 June

Week 2 (29 June - 5 July)

Module 1: Cold War Journalism, 1955-1965

Reading: McCloud, "Race, Class, and the Subversive Cold War Other," 55-94.

Module 2: The American Religious Fringe in the News, 1966-1993

Reading: McCloud, "The Buddha, the Hobbit, and the Christ," 97-126.

Notes: Discussion Forums, initial posts due 1 July, replies due 3 July

Week 3 (6 -12 July)

Module 2: The American Religious Fringe in the News, 1966-1993

Reading: McCloud, "Making the Cult Menace," 127-159.

McCloud, "Essentializing the Margins," 160-191.

McCloud, "Epilogue," 192-194.

Notes: Discussion Forums, initial posts due 8 July, replies due 10 July

Week 4 (13 - 19 July)

Theme 2: Contemporary Religious Issues in the News

Module 3: Health Care and Religion

Readings: TBD, selected by Group Seminar members

Pandemics (ex. COVID-19, HIV/AIDS)

Health Care (ex. The anti-vaccination movement)

Notes: Discussion Forums, initial posts due 15 July, replies due 17 July

Week 5 (20 - 26 July)

Module 3: Health Care and Religion

Readings: TBD, selected by Group Seminar members

Health Care (ex. medical assistance in dying)

Reproductive Rights (ex. Planned Parenthood, home birth movement)

Notes: Discussion Forums, initial posts due 22 July, replies due 24 July

Week 6 (27 July – 2 August)

Module 4: Activism, Protest, and Religion

Readings: TBD, selected by Group Seminar members

Climate Change (ex. Climate science denial).

Race and Ethnicity (ex. Wet'suwet'en and pipeline)

Notes: Discussion Forums, initial posts due 29 July, replies due 31 July

Week 7 (2 - 7 August)

Module 4: Activism, Protest, and Religion

Readings: TBD, selected by Group Seminar members

Race and Ethnicity (ex. Quebec's Bill 21)

Sexualities and Gender (ex. same-sex marriage)

Notes: Discussion Forums, initial posts due 5 August, replies due 7 August

Final Exam, 6-9 August

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

All assignment will be submitted through Avenue to Learn.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+

MARK	GRADE
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Late Assignments

Late assignment will be penalized 3% a day (weekends will count as one day).

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

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”. Please note these regulations have changed beginning Spring/Summer 2015. The timeframe within which the MSAF is valid has been reduced from 5 days to 3 days. The upper limit for which an MSAF can be submitted has been reduced from ‘less than 30%’ to ‘less than 25%’ of the course weight. As per the policy, students must immediately follow up with their instructors to request accommodation for any missed academic work. Failure to do so may negate their relief. If you have any questions about the MSAF, please contact your Associate Dean’s office. MSAF is now available in MOSAIC Student Center (in the drop-down menu under Academics).

Privacy Disclaimer: By using this tool you understand that some personal information will be submitted to your Faculty Office. If you find it necessary to submit the MSAF during this course you must arrange for an extension for any work missed. I do not redistribute grades for missed assignments.

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.

Turnitin.com

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically to Turnitin.com and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must still submit a copy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please to go www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

University Policies

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

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 behavior 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.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University's Policy for [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#).

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable

notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

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 requiring a RISO accommodation 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.