

**What on Earth is Religion?
SCAR 1B03
Spring 2021**

CONTACT INFORMATION

Instructor: Maxwell Kennel

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Office Hours: By appointment. Several drop-in Q&A sessions will also be offered on Zoom.

Lectures: Two lectures will be posted each week on Avenue (asynchronous).

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to the academic study of religion and religions that focuses on key themes in the discourse and examines how scholars approach religiosity both historically and in contemporary global cultures. This course focuses on the history of the discipline, including ideas about what constitutes “religion” and “religions” and the ways in which religious worldviews affect individuals and communities historically and globally.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

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

- Recognize both similarities and differences between how human beings participate in religious communities and embody religiosity.
- Understand fundamental problems and perspectives in the academic study of religion.
- Appreciate the interdisciplinarity, complexity, and diversity of Religious Studies.

REQUIRED MATERIALS AND TEXTS

- Rodrigues & Harding, *Introduction to The Study of Religion*. London: Routledge, 2008.
<https://www.routledge.com/Introduction-to-the-Study-of-Religion/Rodrigues-Harding/p/book/9780415408899> [Abbreviated ISR]
- Other resources and readings (documentaries and supplementary readings) available on Avenue.

COURSE EVALUATION – OVERVIEW

- 10 % Quiz 1
- 20% Quiz 2
- 20% Quiz 3
- 20% Quiz 4
- 30% Final Essay

WEEKLY COURSE SCHEDULE AND REQUIRED READINGS

Week 1. May 3-7. Course Introduction

- Questions: What are the Humanities and Social Sciences? What is the study of religion?
- Reading: ISR, Intro 1-17. and “The Is-Ought Fallacy,” *The Critical Thinking Toolkit*. (Wiley, 2017): 149-152.
- Film: “The Trap” (NFB, 2007). <https://www.nfb.ca/film/trap/>
- Lecture 1: The Social Sciences and Humanities in the University
- Lecture 2: Introducing the Study of Religion

Week 2. May 10-14. Definitions

- Questions: What is religion? What is Religious Studies?
- Reading: Richard King, “The Copernican Turn in the Study of Religion” in *Theory, Religion, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies*. Ed. Richard King (CUP, 2017).
- Lecture 1: A Brief History of Religious Studies
- Lecture 2: ‘The boxes we put things in’: Definitions of Religion and the Problem of Categories

Week 3. May 17-21. Beginnings

- Question: How has religion traditionally been studied?
- Reading: ISR Ch 2, 18-48. and Garrett Fitzgerald, “Introduction to Decoloniality and the Study of Religion” (<https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/decoloniality/introdecolonial/>)
- Film: “Honour Thy Father” (NFB, 2008). https://www.nfb.ca/film/second_stories_honour_thy_father/
- Lecture 1: Traditional Approaches: Christian Theology and Philosophy
- Lecture 2: Problems with Traditional Approaches: Colonialism and Abstraction

Week 4. May 24-28. Religion, the Social Sciences, and Material Cultures

- Questions: What are recent approaches to the study of religion? What are material cultures?
- Readings: ISR Ch 3, 49-73. and David Morgan, “Introduction” to *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*. (Routledge, 2010), 1-17.
- Film: “The Amish: A People of Preservation” (Vision, 2003). Kanopy.
- Lecture 1: Anthropological and Sociological Approaches
- Lecture 2: Political and Economic Approaches

Week 5. May 31-June 4. Phenomenology and Religious Experiences

- Question: How has religious experience been studied? How does it feel to be religious?
- Readings: ISR Ch 4, 74-103. and selections from Maia Kotrosits, *The Lives of Objects: Material Culture, Experience, and the Real in the History of Early Christianity*. (University of Chicago Press, 2020).
- Film: “Marathon Monks” (DER, 2002). Kanopy.
- Lecture 1: Phenomenological and Psychological Approaches
- Lecture 2: Guest Lecture!

Week 6. June 7-11. Judging Religion

- Question: How has religion been critiqued?
- Readings: ISR Ch 5, 104-133.
- Film: “Me and the Mosque” (NFB, 2005). https://www.nfb.ca/film/me_and_mosque/
- Lecture 1: Feminist and Atheist Critiques
- Lecture 2: Critical Theory and the Study of Religion

Week 7. June 14-18. Course Review and Individual Essay Writing Consultations.

- Readings: ISR Ch 6, 134-140. and Boris Groys, “Google: Words Beyond Grammar” *documenta* 13. no. 46 (2012).
- Lecture 1: Essay Writing Suggestions and Topics
- Lecture 2: Religion in the Contemporary World

THE FINE PRINT

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

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.

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.

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:

- 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

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via Avenue to Learn (A2L) plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish to submit their work through A2L and/or Turnitin.com must still submit an electronic and/or hardcopy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com or A2L. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

ON-LINE COMPONENTS

In this course we will be using Avenue2Learn and turnitin.com. 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.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Laptops and tablets are welcome for note-taking and internet searches related to materials being covered in class. Please limit your access to social media during class so as not to prove a distraction to those around you. Cell phones should be turned to vibrate on entering the classroom.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. 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 *Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities* policy.

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.

ABSENCES, MISSED WORK, ILLNESS AND REQUESTS FOR RELIEF 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". ***If you find it necessary to submit the MSAF during this course, you must submit the missed work before the end of classes. I do not redistribute grades for missed assignments. ADDITIONALLY, it is not necessary to contact me to report your submission of the MSAF; simply submit your work as soon as possible.***

Attendance is randomly taken on occasion and for every tutorial in this course as part of the participation and engagement grade. ***Accommodations are not provided for not coming to class since class attendance is part of your obligation to your class peers, instructor and to yourself in our effort to cultivate a scholarly, learning community in this course.*** There are no make-up assignments. If you miss a class due to illness, please contact your teaching assistant as soon as possible. Please do not attach doctors' notes in email messages. Relief should be sought through the faculty office for unexpected absences lasting more than two weeks.

SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments should be submitted to Avenue as .doc(x) or .pdf. Please ***do not*** include a cover page. Assignments submitted in other formats will not be graded. Please do not submit assignments by email attachment unless specifically instructed to do so. If you have a query about a grade for an assignment please see your TA first and then speak to Dr. Carter if the issue is not resolved to your satisfaction.

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.

GRADES

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

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| 90-100 A+ | 70-72 B- | 53-56 D |
| 85-90 A | 67-69 C+ | 50-52 D- |
| 80-84 A- | 63-66 C | 0-49 F |
| 77-79 B+ | 60-62 C- | |
| 73-76 B | 57-59 D+ | |