

Spring 2015

RSOC 119 Religion & (New Media)

MWF 2:15-3:20PM – 214 Kenna Hall

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JESUS TAKES A SELFIE



CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION

Examination of the religious, theological and ethical issues and perspectives raised by various media: print, visual, audio, multimedia, and virtual. Special attention will be given to the nature of their relationship and the religious and spiritual issues currently present in their interface. The course fulfills **RTC3** requirements for the core curriculum. (5 units)

RTC 3 CORE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 Students will be able to identify diverse perspectives and evaluate ethical positions on contemporary questions, specifically those at the intersection of media, religion and culture.
- 3.2 Students will be able to evaluate and apply insights from the study of religion to open-ended questions facing contemporary society.

DIGITAL AGE PATHWAY

This course is associated with Pathway(s) in the Digital Age Pathway. If you declare a Pathway in this area you may use a representative piece of work from this course in the Pathway Portfolio you will complete during your senior year.

Recommendation: Please keep electronic copies of your work.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Increasingly, religion is experienced not only in sacred spaces, and though ritual and scripture, but is also communicated through radio, TV, and the internet, as well as in consumer culture and political campaigns. Likewise, religious communities are consciously adapting new communication technologies to further their missions, outreach, self-identity, and community formation. This course examines the historical and theoretical significance of the intersection between communication technologies and religious communities. In particular, the course will focus on new media technologies and the unique issues of user generated content, non- (or less) hierarchical information flow, and formation of religious community in social networks.

The course will ask students to critically and theoretically explore the significance of religion as a cultural phenomenon as well as to take seriously the theological significance of media practices as articulated by religious subjects. Original student research projects on religious new media use are a core component of the class. The course will primarily focus on U.S.-based media technologies and Christian religious communities, though comparisons will be made with other geographies and other religious traditions.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students will describe the convergence of media, religion, and culture from both social scientific and theological perspectives;
- Students will explain how religion, civil religion, myth, and ritual interact with and through media;
- Students will apply communication theories to contemporary manifestations of religion and media;
- Students will learn key concepts and methods to identify theological meaning of religious practices, as articulated by religious practitioners and theologians;
- Students will compare media and religion functions and practices in the United States and primarily among Christian religious communities with other geographies and other religious traditions;
- Students will evaluate the various areas of inquiry within religion and media and identify their own areas of interest;
- Students will undertake a research project through which they will demonstrate the ability to frame and investigate questions empirically, present their work to their peers, and write a research paper.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THE SYLLABUS MAY CHANGE THROUGHOUT
THE QUARTER TO BETTER ADDRESS THE LEARNING NEEDS OF STUDENTS
OR RESPOND TO OTHER CONTINGENCIES.**

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Required Text:

Morgan, David. (2008). *Keywords in Media, Religion, and Culture*. New York: Routledge. ISBN-13: 978-0415448635

Elizabeth Drescher, *Tweet If You ♥ Jesus: Practicing Church in the Digital Reformation* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2011).

We will also be reading articles, book chapters, and online materials each week. These will be posted on Camino.

Attendance: Students must regularly attend class. Students who are absent or late are responsible for obtaining missed material from classmates. More than two unexcused absences will automatically result in a lower grade and chronic lateness will also be reflected in our evaluation of your participation. Absences due to a verifiable documented emergency (e.g. dire medical condition or family emergency) or a pre-approved activity (e.g. university sanctioned travel) will not affect a student's overall attendance and participation grade. However, the student is still responsible for obtaining missed material from classmates. If a student is involved in any university sanctioned activity (e.g. athletics) that conflict with class, they must give the instructor written documentation of the activity at the beginning of the semester.

Participation: Although a portion of this course will be devoted to lectures, a larger portion will be devoted to class discussions. Everyone is expected to contribute to discussions. Therefore, it is essential that students complete the assigned readings before coming to class. (RTC 3.1)

Midterm Exam: There will be an online midterm exam on **Wednesday, April 29**. The exam format will be some combination of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. Readings, lectures, videos, handouts, and in-class exercises are all source material for exam questions. (RTC 3.1, RTC 3.2)

Final Project: The final project is an opportunity for students to explore a media and religion topic in greater depth. The project consists of a prospectus, an in-class multimedia presentation, and a final paper. (RTC 3.1, RTC 3.2)

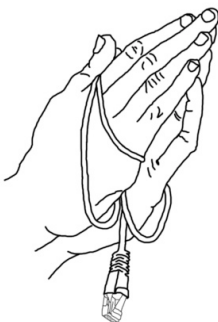
Library Research Workshop: As preparation for the prospectus, final paper, and the presentation, students are required to attend a workshop with a research librarian in the Learning Center on **Monday, April 27** during the class period. Students who do not attend will have 1 point deducted from the prospectus grade, 3 points deducted from their final paper, and 1 point from the final presentation grade.



Prospectus: Students will write a one page paper describing the topic for their final paper. The prospectus should include a thesis or area of inquiry, the research method(s) to be used, and any anticipated sources. The prospectus is due on **Friday, May 1** submitted via email by 5:00 PM.

Class Presentation: Once we have received the prospectuses, we will assign students dates for their class presentations. The class presentation should be ten minutes long and include an explanation of the topic, research method, and any preliminary findings. Fellow students are expected to ask questions and give feedback and suggestions to the presenter.

Final Paper: The final paper is to be typed, Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with 1 inch margins, stapled in the upper left hand corner. The paper should be 2000-2500 words in length (8-10 pages). The final word count should be noted at the bottom of the last page of the paper. More details about paper requirements, including a grading rubric, will be posted on Camino. The final paper is due during the scheduled final exam period (TBD). Hand in a hard copy of your final paper at that time.



GRADING

Students will be evaluated based on their completion of the course requirements listed above and the quality of their work. There are no extra credit assignments for this class. The final course grade will be determined according to the following formulas:

Attendance 5%	Midterm Exam 25%
Class Presentation 10%	Final Paper 20%
Participation 20%	Final Presentation 10%
Prospectus 10%	

A = 94-100
A- = 90-93

B+ = 87-89
B = 84-86
B- = 80-83

C+ = 77-79
C = 74-76
C- = 70-73

D+ = 67-69
D = 64-66
F = 0-63

COURSE POLICIES

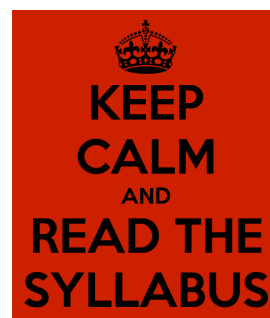
Accountability: You are expected to read and adhere to the guidelines set forth in this syllabus. You are expected to ask questions and get clarification about anything in the syllabus that you do not understand during the first week of class. Do not wait until the end of the semester to express confusion with the course expectations. Before emailing the professor with questions about assignments, please be sure that you have carefully reviewed the syllabus.

Classroom Behavior: Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Students who fail to adhere to behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Faculty have the professional responsibility to treat students with understanding, dignity and respect, to guide classroom discussion, and to set reasonable limits on the manner in which students express opinions. In order to assure a classroom environment conducive to learning, please silence your cell phones and refrain from texting, surfing, sleeping, or engaging in other activities unrelated to the class. It is distracting and disrespectful to everyone else in the class. If any student is found doing work other than that related to the class, all laptops, cell phones, and PDAs will be banned from the classroom. Please don't revoke the privilege of using technology for the rest of your classmates.

Late Policy:

An assignment's grade will drop one full letter grade for every day that an assignment is overdue, such that a B paper will become a C. Extensions for written work will be granted only in exceptional circumstances (e.g. medial/family emergency, military service, religious observance). If you know you will need an extension, please contact us as soon as possible – do not wait until the day an assignment is due.

Disability Accommodation Policy:



To request academic accommodations for a disability, students must contact Disability Resources located in The Drahmman Center in Benson, room 214, (408) 554-4111; TTY (408) 554-5445. Students must provide documentation of a disability to Disability Resources prior to receiving accommodations.

Academic Integrity Policy: The University is committed to academic excellence and integrity. Students are expected to do their own work and to cite any sources they use. A student who is guilty of a dishonest act in an examination, paper, or other work required for a course, or who assists others in such an act, may, at the discretion of the instructor, receive a grade of F for the course. In addition, a student found guilty of a dishonest act may be subject to sanctions up to and including dismissal from the University as a result of the student judicial process as described in the Community Handbook. A student who violates copyright laws, including those covering the copying of software programs, or who knowingly alters official academic records from this or any other institution is subject to similar disciplinary action.



INTRODUCTION

Monday, March 30

- Expectations
- Course syllabus
- Project guidelines

Questions for discussion: How do you experience religion in (new) media contexts? How do you experience media in religious contexts?

UNIT 1: RELIGION AND MEDIA AS CULTURE

Wednesday, April 1 and Friday April 3

We will start the semester reading some important works from communication studies and religion and media in order to establish the culturalist point of view that we will be engaging this semester.

Reading:

- Geertz, Clifford. (1973). "Religion as a Cultural System," In *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 87-125.
- Carey, James. (1988). "Mass Communication and Cultural Studies," In *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*. Boston: Unwin-Hyman, pp. 37-67.
- Morgan, David. (2008). "Introduction. Media, Religion, Culture: The Shape of the Field" in D. Morgan (Ed.) *Keywords in Media, Religion, and Culture*. New York: Routledge, pp. 1-19.
- Drescher, *Tweet*, Introduction and ch. 1, pp. 1-33.

Questions for discussion: How do changes in media technologies impact cultural practices? How do changes in culture impact the media practices? (Morgan) How do media technologies intersect with religion in the lived experience of ordinary people? (Drescher) How can the culturalist framework be applied to the study of religion and media? (Carey and Geertz) What approaches does this method preclude?

Monday, April 6

This week we consider how media, religion, and culture converge as a field of study.

Reading:

- Zito, Angela. (2008). "Culture" in D. Morgan (Ed.) *Keywords in Media, Religion, and Culture*. New York: Routledge, pp. 69-82.
- Horsfield, Peter. (2008). "Media" in D. Morgan (Ed.) *Keywords in Media, Religion, and Culture*. New York: Routledge, pp. 111-122.
- Morgan, David. (2008). "Religion" in D. Morgan (Ed.) *Keywords in Media, Religion, and Culture*. New York: Routledge, pp. 160-171.

Questions for discussion: Is there anything surprising about how the discipline defines these commonly used words? Are the definitions too broad? Too narrow?

Wednesday, April 8 and Friday, April 10

The authors below argue that media and religion are nearly inextricably intertwined both historically (Zito, Drescher) and in contemporary culture (Hjarvard).

Reading:

- Zito, Angela. (2010). "Religion as Media(ation)" in B. Verter and J. Wolfart (Eds.) *Retbinking Religion 101: Critical Issues in Religious Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Read the excerpt found at <http://therevealer.org/archives/2853>]
- Hjarvard, Stig. (2008). "The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change." *Northern Lights*, 6(2008), pp. 9-26. [http://www.atypon-link.com/INT/doi/pdf/10.1386/nl.6.1.9_1?cookieSet=1]
- Drescher, *Tweet*, pp. 34-56.

Questions for discussion: Are there areas of religion that are *not* prone to mediation? Are there things that are essentially or authentically "religious"? How does the mediation of religion change over time? What are the intersections of media and religion that interest you the most?

UNIT 2: CIVIL RELIGION, MYTH, AND RITUAL

Monday, April 13

This week we examine the American context and discuss the commonplace ways that religion and media function therein. We will discuss the communication studies perspective of American civil religion as enabled by media as well as theological perspectives that challenge the notion of American civil religion.

Reading/Viewing:

- Watch Coke's 2014 Super Bowl Ad [available at <http://tinyurl.com/SuperBowlCokeAd>] and google some of the reactions to the advertisement.
- Hughes, Richard T. (2004). "The Myth of the Christian Nation." From *Myths America Lives By*. Urbana, IL: University of Chicago Press, pp. 66-90.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. "The End of American Protestantism" [available at <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2013/07/02/3794561.htm>]

Questions for discussion: Is America a Christian Nation? What constitutes the distinctiveness of religion in America? What religious practices are embedded in the American "way of life"? What are the defining characteristics of civil religion, myth, and ritual? What kind of Christianity



is presumed to be at the heart of “American Christianity”? Why was Coke’s 2014 Super Bowl ad so controversial in religious terms?

Wednesday, April 15 and Friday, April 17

Although we don’t think of film as “new” media, the impact of film at its inception can inform our study of contemporary communication technologies. This week in class we will watch a portion of *Birth of a Nation* which Salter argues is an early filmic instantiation of American civil religion as well as an early form of what today we would call a music video.

Reading/Viewing

- Watch Billie Holiday’s performance of “Strange Fruit” on YouTube [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4ZyuULy9zs>], Nina Simone’s commentary on the song [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8Lq_yasEgo], and look up the background of the song on Wikipedia.
- Salter, Richard C. (Oct 2004). “*The Birth of a Nation* as American Myth.” *The Journal of Religion and Film*, 8(2). [<http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/Vol8No2/SalterBirth.htm>]
- Cone, James. “‘Nobody Knows de Trouble I See’: The Cross and the Lynching Tree in Black Experience” from *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Orbis, 2013).

Questions for discussion: Try to identify the elements Salter argues are used in the creation of “Americanness.” Are there contemporary films that operate in the same way? James Cone reflects on the cross and the lynching tree in Black experience. Keeping in mind our earlier discussions, how does the way Cone links the images of the Christian cross with the images of lynchings of Black people in America implicate Christian theology in “the American myth”? Beyond the obvious emotional depiction of racism the song “Strange Fruit” offers, what else might Nina Simone have meant when she said, “It’s about America”?

Monday, April 20

Despite ongoing public rhetoric that America is “a Christian nation” and its opposite – the celebration of American religious diversity – one of the fastest growing demographic groups in the United States is the “Nones” – those who do not identify with a particular institutional religion, the majority of whom retain a belief in God or a life force and, even when they do not, may have a number of practices that they think of as “spiritual.”

Readings:

- Nancy Ammerman, “Spiritual But Not Religious? Beyond Binary Choices in the Study of Religion,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 52:2 (June 2013): 258-278.
- Drescher, *Tweet*, 95-123.
- Spend some time on both of these websites and ask how each contributes to our understanding Nones: <http://freq.ueni.es/> and <http://killingthebuddha.com/>

Discussion Questions: What role do various forms of media have the development of the growing population of Nones? How do you see Nones drawing on media resources to support their extra-institutional spiritual lives?

UNIT 3: AUDIENCE STUDIES

Wednesday, April 22 and Friday, April 24

We now retreat from our interrogation of media and religion from the societal perspectives in order to consider household and individual use of media.

- Hoover, Stewart M. (2008). “Audiences” in D. Morgan (Ed.) *Keywords in Media, Religion, and Culture*. New York: Routledge, pp. 160-171.

- Clark, Lynn Schofield. (2003). “Touched by a Vampire Named Angel: The Supernatural in Contemporary Teen Popular Culture” in *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 46-74, 261-265.
- Clark, Lynn Schofield. (2003). “Religion, Class, and Politics: Discussing Aliens and Angels in the Family and in Society” in *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 204-223, 277-280.

Questions for discussion: What do we gain from investigating media and religion at the individual/household level? Do people use “secular” media “religiously”? Think about what audience studies can tell us from a media studies perspective and from a theological perspective. What questions about audiences might each of those fields ask...and answer?

Monday, April 27 – REQUIRED Library Research Workshop

Wednesday, April 29 – MIDTERM EXAM ON CANVAS – No Class Session

Friday, May 1 - PROSPECTUS DUE Submit via email by 5 PM

Friday, May 1

Many theologians have attempted to “read” popular culture and popular media for “theological content” (e.g., how a character in a movie might be a “Christ figure,” how a song might riff on religious idioms, how consumer products might have spiritual meaning).

- Tom Beaudoin, Part I: “Why Religion Still Matters: GenX, Pop Culture, and the Search for God,” in *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (Jossey-Bass, 2000), pp.3-49.
- Marsh, Clive and Vaughn S. Roberts. *Personal Jesus: How Popular Music Shapes Our Souls*, selections TBD.

Questions for discussion: How do theologians take account of the way individuals and communities use and consume popular culture that may not have any explicit or symbolic theological “meaning”? How do you find popular culture to be meaningful or significant in your spiritual lives or in the lives of people you know?

Monday, May 4



We now look at a selection of case studies illustrating how new media function in the religious practices of diasporic populations in post-colonial contexts.

Questions for discussion: How do media technologies reinforce, weaken, or complicate diaspora identities? Do these uses of media represent what Hjvard calls mediatization? Do these uses of media have theological implications?

- Morgan, David. (2008). “Technology” in D. Morgan (Ed.) *Keywords in Media, Religion, and Culture*. New York: Routledge, pp. 187-197.
- Zaman, S. (2008). “From Imam to Cyber-Mufti: Consuming Identity in Muslim America” in *Muslim World*, 98(4):465-474.
- Mandaville, Peter. (2001). “Reimagining Islam in Diaspora” in *Gazette*, 63(2-3):169-186.

Wednesday, May 6

Today we examine the postcolonial context from a theological perspective.

Readings:

- Kwok, Pui-Lan. “Introduction” in *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2005)

- *Women, Writing, Theology: Transforming a Tradition of Exclusion*, edited by Emily Holmes and Wendy Farley (Baylor University Press, 2011), selections TBD

Questions for discussion: How have theologians thought about Christian belief and practice in the diasporic or postcolonial context? How are these theological explorations akin or distinct from those we engaged last class?

UNIT 4: THE INTERNET, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Monday, May 11

For the next three classes we will discuss how the web changes religious experience and how religious groups are making use of online resources in their religious practices.

- Smith, Joyce. (2008). “Public” in D. Morgan (Ed.) *Keywords in Media, Religion, and Culture*. New York: Routledge, pp. 148-159.
- Brasher, Brenda E. (2001). “The Ultimate Diaspora: Religion in the Perpetual Present of Cyberspace” in *Give Me That Online Religion*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 24-45.
- Campbell, Heidi. “Introduction” in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (Routledge, 2012), pp. 1-22.

Questions for discussion: What is the difference between an “audience” and a “public?” How are religious “publics” different from others? How do conceptualizations of audiences and publics impact our approach to researching practices?

Wednesday, May 13 and Friday, May 15

- Campbell, Heidi. “How Religious Communities Negotiate New Media Religiously,” in *Digital Religion, Social Media and Culture: Perspectives, Practices and Futures*, edited by Paula Hope Cheong, et al. (Peter Lang, 2012), pp. 81-96.
- Echchaibi, Nabil. “Alt-Muslim: Muslims and Modernity’s Discontents,” in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (Routledge, 2012), pp.190-198.
- Asamoah-Gyadu, J. (2008). “Community” in D. Morgan (Ed.) *Keywords in Media, Religion, and Culture*. New York: Routledge, pp. 56-68.
- Drescher, *Tweet*, 123-156.

Questions for discussion: How do online practices and new digital communication technologies change the way religious communities practice their faith? How does the internet impact religious authority? Does the internet impart more or less legitimacy to new religious groups? How does new media practice affect the way we think about authentic religious experience?

Monday, May 18

- Anderson, Keith, *The Digital Cathedral: Networked Ministry in a Wireless World* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2015), selections TBD.
- Spardaro, Antonio. *Cybertheology: Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet*. Trans. by Maria Way (Fordham University Press, 2014), selections TBD.

Questions for discussion: Given the challenges and possibilities of digital technology and new media, how do theologians and religious leaders interpret these technologies within a theological and pastoral framework?

UNIT 5: CLASS PRESENTATION AND ADVANCED TOPICS

The majority of our class time in the final two weeks of the quarter will be spent on student presentations of their original research. To complement these presentations, the professor will select readings that complement the research topics students have chosen, as well as topics the class votes to study in more depth.

Wednesday, May 20

Class presentations

- Readings TBD

Friday, May 22

Class presentations

- Readings TBD

Monday, May 25–NO CLASS–MEMORIAL DAY HOLIDAY

Wednesday, May 27

Class presentations

- Readings TBD

Monday, June 1

Class presentations

- Readings TBD

Wednesday, June 3

Class presentations

- Readings TBD

Friday, June 5

Class presentations or final review (depending number of student presentations)

- Readings TBD

WEEK of June 8–Date and Time TBD

Final Exam - Research Papers Due

