“To interpret the religious tradition is to enter a conflict and to make a choice. Our appropriation of our heritage is never neutral; it displays our intention and purpose for its use.” –Rita Gross.

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When and Where do we meet?

Class discussions: TBA  
Office Hours: By appointment ONLY | Tue/ Thu 3:30-4:30 pm, DM 301  
Coaching sessions: By appointment ONLY | Tue/ Thu xx

Why Should I Care about Religion?

Sure, you’ve heard Niche’s famous statement “God is dead.” This statement, however, has been grossly misinterpreted. First, what kind of God was the God that died? And second, considering the context in which Niche said this, what were the consequences of God’s death? Who had killed God and for what purpose?

To be sure, today God is very much alive. Perhaps not in the same ways as in the past centuries, but just by looking around we find that our politics, pop culture, and every-day-life is awash with religious symbols, rituals, and motivations. The question at hand is: in what ways is God alive and why is this relevant to my career, my private, and civic life?
Beyond this western approach we will also explore other debates such as, why do bad things happen to good people? Is religion irrelevant in our fast-paced technological world? Does the sacred look the same across traditions? How can the study of religion help us understand current events? Is religion a creative or destructive force?

This course is interested in examining the different expressions, practices, and interpretations of religion from an interdisciplinary perspective. Although no particular tradition will be favored, materials from several traditions will be chosen to exemplify thematic topics in the experience of the Sacred. We will also focus on the tenets of religions, dispelling common misconceptions and assumptions and looking into the emergence of new practices among the post-denominational generation.

**How can this course help you advance in your career?**

You do not need to be majoring in religious studies or a field within humanities to benefit from this course.

Religious illiteracy can greatly impact our ability to understand personal and social motivations behind financial decisions, political engagement, science and technological advancement, environmental and migration policies, family planning, diet and food production, gender relations, war and terrorist attacks, and more. Whether you notice or not, religion is a universal phenomenon that continues to transform and be transformed by our societies.

Our approach is interdisciplinary, which means you will be critically reflecting from many fields of study such as philosophy, psychology, cultural studies, history, economics, gender studies, among others. This enhances your ability to think critically, communicate effectively, respond sensitively, and better collaborate and resolve conflict.
Some of the major challenges in our globalized societies are rooted in how we relate and communicate with one another. Achieving a meaningful connection with women and men inside and outside of our immediate communities demands a basic understanding of our different worldviews and how we negotiate social order. The sacred and the profane are boundaries that exist in every culture, but they are not homogenous. Learning how to navigate them not only can buttress your professional profile, but also your growth as an individual.

**How will you succeed in this course?**

Ask/Participate:
Learning is a complex process, but what is certain is that those who do the teaching or share their ideas with others are the ones who do the learning. Prepare and be ready to be involved in-class and on-line discussions. There will be a variety of majors being represented in class, which will make conversations more dynamic and enriching.

Reach out:
This may be a course that is very different from other courses, with complex interdisciplinary theories and field-work assignments. To maximize your learning experience, I have set aside coaching sessions to help you address challenges with content and/or writing, presenting or any other project. I will meet with you or respond to your email within 24 hours (except for the weekends). You should let me know what ideas of projects are challenging so that we may work together to help you learn.

Take risks:
Religion is commonly considered a taboo topic, but our classroom is a safe space for honest and controversial debate and conversation. You will be rewarded for going out on a limb and proposing your own critical views as long as you support your arguments in a transparent manner.

Have fun: whatever we do we joy we remember.
Required Text

* Other reading materials will be provided by the instructor.

How will Your progress be evaluated?

Quarter Examinations (40%):
There will be four examinations throughout the semester. Each examination will be online, time-restrictive, composed by an objective and subjective sections. The objective section will consist of 20 multiple choice/true and false/matching. For the subjective portion, students will receive two possible essay questions one week prior to the exam, which they must submit on Canvas. Each section is worth 50 points for a total of 100.

- Subjective portion:
  - The length of the essay portion should be 500-750 words.
  - Use examples from our reading materials to support your arguments. Cite sources correctly.
  - The more detailed your answer the better.

- Objective portion:
The time limit to complete each examination is 35 minutes.
You will have two chances to complete the examination. The highest grade will be recorded.

Assignments (40%):
There will be two written projects: the site-visit interview and the final paper. Essays will be turned into Turnitin.com via Assignments in Canvas. It is not necessary to create a separate Turnitin account. Keep electronic and paper copies of all written work. For your own protection, keep a copy of your Turnitin.com electronic receipt until you have received your final grade for the course.

Academic paper 1: Site-Visit Interview (20%)

The student will do field research by attending a religious service or ceremony outside of his/her own religious tradition (including the family’s religion even if they are non-practicing members). This means that the student must choose a religion that is absolutely foreign to her/him. The rule of thumb is: If the religion you choose uses the same sacred scripture as your home tradition, then this religion is instantly disqualified.

For this assignment the student has three options:

- Paper format: 1200-1500 words and cited correctly.
- Video format: of 5-7 minutes maximum. The video must be well edited, feature interviewees, images and good quality audio. You will still have to write a script and include a bibliography. Examples of the video format will be provided.
  - Video example: https://youtu.be/JhLN7dtukig
- Audio format: 7-10 minutes. Just like the video, It must be well edited, feature interviewees, natural sound, and good quality audio. You will still have to write the script and include a bibliography. Examples of the audio format will be provided.

- Tip: Keep a journal to help your memory remain fresh.

For more details about this assignment, see Assignments in Canvas.

**Academic Paper 2 - Final Report (20%)**

Make use of your creativity and propose your own topic. By the end of the semester, you will be equipped with a variety of theories and topics from which to choose from. I recommend finding a topic that can merge both your major and religious studies. Every student must schedule an appointment with the instructor to get cleared before embarking on the research. The paper must be 5-7-long, double-spaced, 12-size font. Use five academic sources to support and elaborate on your thesis.

- Each paper is worth 100 points, and 20% of the final grade.
- Each paper has to include a minimum of five academic sources (see instructor or librarian if not sure about what an “academic source”).
- Each paper has specific instructions posted on Canvas.
- Late papers may be accepted.

**Participation (10%):** You are expected to be present in class and engage in the weekly in-person and online sessions. This includes attendance and posting weekly questions on the reading/media material.

Weekly questions: (140 possible points) Every week a student must post a question from the readings on the Canvas discussion board. Your question must be posted by Wednesday/ 11:59 pm and you should have responded to at least one peer by Sunday/ 11: 59 pm.
• Weekly questions must be open-ended and show struggle and involvement. Respond sensitively to your peers.

Op-Ed Discussion Section (70 possible points)
We will be using film to articulate theories and ideas. In this Canvas discussion section, students will post their reviews of four total movies that will be viewed throughout the semester (if we do not watch/ or finish watching them in class, students are responsible for watching them home).

• We will watch Black Robe, Luther, God on Trial, and Miss Representation (other films will also be recommended).
• Each movie will have a free link to watch at home.
• Each movie will have a document with questions that should shape your reflection and review of the movie.
• Each review is worth 10 points for a total of 40 points.
• Due dates on calendar.

The Megan Project Picture: You will also be posting three pictures under this Op-Ed discussion section. This project is the continuation of a student’s brilliant idea of spotting and photographing religion everywhere she found it. You will be surprised to learn that pop culture is imbued with religion in many ways. Fashion, music, TV, art, and food are just some of the mediums through which religion is articulated.

• Take a picture or video and briefly explain how religion is being represent and its relevance in your discovery.
• Themes: Picture one –the sacred and society, picture two –sacred ritual, picture three –sacred symbol.
• Each picture and its analysis is worth 10 points for a total of 30 points.
• Due dates on Calendar.
• See more details on Canvas.
Blog: What you didn’t learn in Religion Class
(Editors will receive up to 10 points toward one of the objective examinations)

This is our class blog. This blog is a public space for us to connect with each other and
the world. Every student will receive an invitation to become an author and actively
participate. The blog title is What you didn't learn in Class- precisely because it will be a
space for us to elaborate on ideas and topics that perhaps don't get mentioned in class
either because of time or any other inconvenience.

Blog editors will choose and post work from classmates that show commitment, conflict,
reflection, and judgment.

Group talks (10%)
Students will sign up for a group during the first week of classes. If you fail to sign up,
you will be assigned a group by me. Groups will organize and put together a lecture
based on the theme of the week using visual aids such as PowerPoint, Prezi, or similar
technology.

- Each student must choose a case study that showcases the theory studied
during that week of class. Every student has five to seven minutes to present
their case.
- Find a current event related to your topic. This information can be obtained from
various sources which are included in the sites I recommend on the blog.
- Propose an activity to spur discussion in class. Ask questions to your audience
through a debate, survey, game, etc.
Week 1. Introduction: What is religion?
August 20- 26

Tasks of the week:

- Read Livingstone Chapter 1 (all -Thursday).
- Sign up for a group.
- Choose religious house for site visit project.
- Study this learning guide and develop a learning plan.
- Become familiar with Canvas.

Tuesday: Introduction and class plan.
Thursday: Chapter 1 lecture and discussion.

Week 2: Ways of Study Religion /
The Sacred and the Holy
August 27- September 2

Tasks of the week:

- Read Livingston Ch 2 (all -Tuesday)
• Read Livingston Ch 3 (37-45 -Thursday)
• Post discussion question #1 by Wednesday/ 11:59 and peer response by Sunday 11:59 pm.
• Submit first part of Site Visit Interview throughout Turnitin on Canvas by Sunday 11:59 pm.
• Contact religious house for site visit –Identify what you need to know and set your visit and interview agenda (see Canvas for instructions).

Tuesday: Ways of Studying religion lecture and discussion.
Thursday: The sacred and the Holy lecture and discussion.

Week 3. The Sacred and the Holy (cont.)
September 3- 9
Tasks of the week:
• Read Livingston Ch 3 (42-50 by Tuesday).
• Post discussion question #2 by Wednesday/ 11:59 and peer response by Sunday 11:59 pm.
• Post first movie review -Black Robe (due Sunday by 11:59 pm –see details on Canvas)
• First group talk.

Tuesday: The Sacred and the holy lecture and discussion. Group talk #1 (Sacred and the Holy). Be early and ready to set up.
Thursday: Black Robe discussion.

Week 4. Sacred Symbol, Myth, and Doctrine
September 10- 16
Tasks of the week:
• Read Livingston Ch 4 (all)
• **Post** discussion question #3 by Wednesday/ 11:59 and peer response by Sunday 11:59 pm.

• **Post** first MP picture – The sacred and society (due Sunday by 11:59 pm)

• **Examination #1 (Ch1-3)** – Opens Thursday 10:00 am – Closes Sunday 11:59 pm).

Tuesday: Lecture and discussion.

Thursdays: cont. Debate and Group talk # 2 (Sacred Symbol). Be early and ready to set up.

**Week 5. Sacred Ritual**  
**September 17- 23**

Task of the week:

• Read Livingstone Ch 5 (all)

• **Post** discussion question #4 by Wednesday/ 11:59 and peer response by Sunday 11:59 pm.

• **Post** second Movie review –Luther by Sunday, 11:59 pm. (See canvas for details).

Tuesday: Lecture and discussion.

Thursday: Cont. Debate and Group talk #3 (Sacred Ritual). Be early and ready to set up.
Week 6. Sacred Scripture
September 24-30

Tasks of the week:

- Read Livingstone Ch 6 (all)
- Post discussion question #5 by Wednesday/ 11:59 and peer response by Sunday 11:59 pm.
- Submit Site visit interview – Part two by Sunday 11:59 pm.

Tuesday: Lecture and discussion.
Thursday: Cont. Debate and Group talk #4 (Sacred Scripture). Be early and ready to set up.

Week 7. Society and the Sacred
October 1-7

Tasks of the week:

- Read Livingstone Ch 7 (all)
- Post discussion question #5 by Wednesday/ 11:59 and peer response by Sunday 11:59 pm.
- Complete Examination #2 (chapters 4-6) Opens Thursday, 10:00am - Closes Sunday, 11:59 pm.

Tuesday: Lecture and discussion.
Thursday: Cont. Debate and Group talk #5 (Society and the sacred). Be early and ready to set up.
October 8-14

Tasks of the week:
- Read Livingstone Ch 8 (all)
- **Post** discussion question #6 by Wednesday/ 11:59 and peer response by Sunday 11:59 pm.
- **Post** second MP Picture by Sunday 11:59 pm.

Tuesday: Lecture and discussion.
Thursday: Cont. Debate and Group talk #6 (Concepts of the Divine). Be early and ready to set up.

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Week 9. Cosmogony: Origins of the Natural and Social Order
October 15-21

Tasks of the week:
- Read Livingstone Ch 9 (all)
- **Post** discussion question #7 by Wednesday/ 11:59 and peer response by Sunday 11:59 pm.

Tuesday: Lecture and discussion.
Thursday: Cont. Debate and Group talk #7 (Cosmogony). Be early and ready to set up.

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Week 10. Views of the Human Problem
October 22-28

Tasks of the week:
- Read Livingstone Ch 10 (all)
• Post discussion question #8 by Wednesday/11:59 and peer response by Sunday 11:59 pm.
• Complete Examination #3 (Chapters 7-9) – Opens Thursday, 10:00 am, Closes Sunday 11:59 pm.

Tuesday: Lecture and discussion.
Thursday: Cont. Debate

**Week 11. The Human Problem cont./ Theodicy**  
**October 29- November 4**

Tasks of the week:
• Read Livingston Ch 11 (235-242)
• Post discussion question #9 by Wednesday/11:59 and peer response by Sunday 11:59 pm.
• Submit Part 1 of Final Paper by Sunday 11:59 pm.

Tuesday: Lecture and discussion. Group talk # 8 (Human Problem). Be early and ready to set up.
Thursday: Lecture. Theodicy

**Week 12. Theodicy: Encountering Evil**  
**November 5-11**

Tasks of the week:
• Read Livingston Ch 11 (finish chapter)
• **Post** discussion question #10 by Wednesday/ 11:59 and peer response by Sunday 11:59 pm.
• **Post** MP Picture #3 by Sunday 11:59 pm.

Tuesday: Lecture and discussion.
Thursday: God on Trial debate.

**Week 13. Encountering Evil cont./Ethics**  
**November 12-18**

Tasks of the week:
• Read Ch 12 (259-274)
• **Post** Movie Review “God on trial” by Sunday 11:59 pm.
• **Post** discussion question #11 by Wednesday/ 11:59 and peer response by Sunday 11:59 pm.

Tuesday: Cont. Theodicy debate. **Group talk #9** (Theodicy). Be early and ready to set up.
Thursday: Ethics. Lecture and discussion.

**Week 14. Ethics**  
**November 19-25**

Tasks of the week:
• Read Chapter 12 (finish chapter)

Tuesday: Miss Representation debate.
Thursday: **Thanksgiving**.
Week 15. Ethics cont.
November 26- December 2

Tasks of the week:

- Post movie review “Miss Representation” by Sunday/ 11:59 pm.
- **Submit** Final paper by Sunday at 11:59 pm.

Tuesday: Lecture and discussion. Group talk # 10 (Ethics). Be early and ready to set up.

Thursday: Lecture and debate.

Week 16. Final’s Week
December 3-9

Task of the Week:

- Examination #4 – (Chapters 10-12) TBA

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**Goals**

- Analyze and interpret the universal dimensions of the sacred.
- Discover the relevance and practice of religion in everyday life.
- Recognize the academic impact of religion as an interdisciplinary field.
- Investigate the potential of religion as a transformational force for the self and society.
- Develop a critical and open-minded approach to religion that questions assumptions.
- Explore religion as a platform that increases civic engagement and global awareness.

**Objectives**
1. Understanding the complexity of the definitions of religion and secularization.
2. Dissect the universal forms of religious experience and expression such as sacred symbols, rituals, myths, scriptures, ethics, and communities.
3. Identify religious themes and patterns that shape our everyday life.
4. Analyze a wide range of religious beliefs and practices as an avenue for better understanding religion in our individual, cultural, economic, and political contexts.
5. Recognize the strength of utilizing different approaches, theories, and methodologies to better understand the study of religion.
6. Evaluate the interrelationship between the student’s own and other’s religious views in order to avoid uninformed assumptions.
7. Inspire students to formulate their own religious beliefs or philosophies of life.
8. Develop college-level academic writing and communication skills.
9. Understand and discuss the major contemporary theoretical approaches to religious truth claims and meaning-making practices.
10. Foster creativity and self-confidence in a communal setting.
11. Better understand how an individual’s identity and outlook are shaped by religious influences.
12. Critically engage the issue of religious diversity and dialogue in national and international context.
13. Reflect upon and enhance student’s potential for moral agency and compassion.

**Gordon Rule Requirement**

As this is a Gordon Rule course, students will be required to write a minimum of two major assignments. Each paper will be at least 1500-2000 words and will be submitted through Turnitin. All source material must be cited correctly using MLA Style and long quotes should be avoided. Please be aware that papers with an originality score of over 35% similarity will be subject to additional scrutiny and may incur additional penalties, up to and including receiving an F (0 points).
Global Learning Objectives
As a Global Learning course, students will meet the following objectives through text readings, assignments, and class discussions:
1. Students will be able to analyze topics in the field of religious studies from multiple perspectives.
2. Students will be able to assess how global issues and trends are interrelated with the development and practice of religions.
3. Students will be able to demonstrate willingness to think creatively about religious issues in the contemporary world.

Plagiarism
Do you know what plagiarism is? Avoid the pitfalls of plagiarism by asking me, a representative from the writing center or our library to explain. Many students end up plagiarizing material because they do not know what it entails. In short, plagiarism, or attempting to pass off another's work as your own, falls into three different categories:
1. A written work that is entirely stolen from another source;
2. Using quotations from another source without properly citing them; and
3. Paraphrasing from another source without proper citations.

Students are expected to understand the definition of plagiarism. See the University Code of Academic Integrity at http://www.fiu.edu/~oabp/misconductweb/2codeofacainteg.htm if you need further clarification. Offenders will receive a grade of F (0 points) for the plagiarized assignment, and possibly for the course. Please be aware: Previously submitted papers are not allowed, even if it is your own work and even if you are retaking this class. You may not “reuse” papers.