

**SRS 3110: Religion, Spirituality and Culture in**  
**Contemporary Western Society**  
**Prof. Emma Anderson**  
Fall 2020

**Course schedule:**

Mondays, 8:30-9:50 am and Thursdays, 10:00-11:20 am, via *Zoom*.

**Professor's contact information:**

Email: [eanderso@uottawa.ca](mailto:eanderso@uottawa.ca)

Office Telephone: (613) 562-5800 X 1176, (if I am not there, please leave me a message and I will call you back)

**Professor's weekly office hours:**

My plan is to stay on *Zoom* for half an hour after each class (so Mondays from 9:50 am until around 10:20 am (longer if necessary) and Thursdays from 11:20 am until around 11:50 am, again, longer if necessary) so you can ask me your individual questions, get assistance, etc. If there is something more personal or confidential you want to discuss with me, the best thing is to email me at [eanderso@uottawa.ca](mailto:eanderso@uottawa.ca). Then, if necessary, we can arrange a time to speak on the phone (or on *Zoom*), should that be necessary.

**Calendar Course Description:**

Contemporary religious approaches to modernity and meaning; the differences between religion and spirituality; secularization and religious/spiritual resurgence; religion and authoritarianism; atheism and contemporary alternatives to religion.

**Extended Description:**

This course seeks to explore the evolution of five major religious approaches to modernity in the West. We will explore, sequentially, the religious worldviews of:

- 1) religious traditionalists, who attempt to conserve and defend their respective faiths in the face of what they perceive as the anomie and moral confusion of the modern world
- 2) religious reformers, who seek to revitalize and retool their religions to make them more "relevant" to modernity
- 3) atheists, who attempt to dethrone religion from what they see as its position of unearned, dangerous social prominence and
- 4) extremists and terrorists, who embrace a radicalized form of their religion and utilise violence to impose their vision on others, or to do battle with what they see as "the forces of evil," and
- 5) spiritual seekers, who, through their highly individual quests for religious meaning, are creating a new way of "doing" religion.

Each of these religious responses to modernity will be explored in sequence. However, in practice, each of these five movements are intimately interrelated and in continuous dialogue with one another. In fact, it would not be too much to say that each of these religious approaches to modernity has helped to create, shape, and reshape the others through their continual interactions and reactions to one another. Some of these approaches could not be in greater contrast (such as traditionalism and atheism, for example). Yet others share so much middle ground as to seem, at times, virtually indistinguishable (such as religious reformers and spiritual seekers). Others are in a continual process of re-radicalizing one another (as when atheists condemn all religion, not just extremism, as dangerous and harmful, further "proving" to religious extremists that they are being "dishonoured" or are "under threat." Yet, despite their profound similarities and striking differences, it is indubitable that each of these five religious reactions are alternative responses to the same difficult questions

posed by modernity. Our purpose in this course is to attempt to understand these religious perspectives on reality and how they motivate the actions of contemporary religious actors both in the West and globally.

**Required texts:**

All of the readings for this course will be available online, either as e-resources through the Morisset Library, or on our course website, on Brightspace. There is thus no need to buy a Course Packet. However, students who wish to acquire their chosen books for Assignment #1 (please see the details below) may do so.

**Adaptions to the Course due to Covid 19:**

Because of the ongoing health restrictions related to Covid 19, the course is currently scheduled as an online seminar. Despite this, my plan is to offer my class lectures **synchronously** at the regular class times through *Zoom*, which will allow us to see and hear each other, as well as being able to view my PowerPoint slides at the same time. This will allow students to ask me questions or ask me to clarify points in real time, making the experience more like an in-classroom course. However, I will also be recording these classes (or at least the audio portion thereof) and posting them to Brightspace for the convenience of students who miss a class, or are following our course from a different time zone. Nonetheless, students are encouraged to participate live as much as humanly possible for an optimal experience.

**Assignments and Evaluation:**

**Assignment #1: Learning through Disparate Sources Essay (30%) due Thursday, October 22, 2020.**

Both primary sources (materials written by people who are a part of the inner thought-world that they describe) and novels can often provide an incredibly stimulating and accessible “in” to the way that people think, feel, and believe. For this assignment, students will carefully read two books that address similar themes (one of which is either a primary source or a fictional source, and the other a secondary, non-fiction source) and then write a thoughtful essay of ten (10) pages (double-spaced, exclusive of title page, notes, or bibliography) that analyzes and assesses the works comparatively.

Please pick one of the “twinned” titles below and start reading! Or, if you would like, feel free to suggest your own idea for two related books to the instructor, keeping in mind that your books must both address some aspect of contemporary religion, and that one must be either a primary source or a novel, and the other a factual, secondary source. While you may structure your essay as you wish, your essay must: 1) (very briefly) overview the works, 2) analyze points of difference in presentation and interpretation of similar incidents, people, or events and 3) reflect on how differences in presentation between fiction/primary source and the secondary/non-fiction effected your appreciation or understanding of the material covered. Students must submit me their essay through Brightspace before midnight on Thursday, October 22, 2020.

***A) De-conversion: Primary and Secondary Perspectives***

*Primary:* - Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel: My Life*. New York: Free Press, 2007 (memoir) and

*Secondary:* - Simon Cottee, *The Apostates: When Muslims Leave Islam*. London: Hurst & Company, 2015

**or**

*Primary:* - Shalom Auslander. *Foreskin’s Lament: A Memoir*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2007 (or)

- Deborah Feldman, *Unorthodox: The Scandalous Rejection of my Hasidic Roots*. Simon and Schuster, 2012 (memoir) (or)

*Secondary:* - Ayala Fader, *Hidden Heretics: Jewish Doubt in the Digital Age*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020 (**Morisset Library e-resource**). **Those picking this option may also, additionally, wish to see the series, *Unorthodox*, based on Feldman’s memoir, available on Netflix.**

**or**

*Primary:* - Megan Phelps-Roper, *Unfollow: A Memoir of Loving and Leaving the Westboro Baptist Church*, 2019 (memoir) (or) **Those picking this option may also, additionally, wish to watch Phelps-Roper’s TedTalk on YouTube.**

- Tara Westover, *Educated: A Memoir*. Random House, 2018 (or)

- Miriam Toews. *A Complicated Kindness*, Knopf Canada, 2004 (novel)  
*Secondary*: - F. Elijah Dann, *Leaving Fundamentalism: Personal Stories*. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press, 2008 (**Morisset Library e-resource**).

**B) The Boko Haram Kidnappings in Fact and Fiction:**

*Fiction*: - Edna O'Brian. *Girl*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2019.

*Non-fiction*: - Helon Habila. *The Boko Haram Kidnappings and Islamist Militancy in Nigeria*. New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2016 (or)

- Isha Sesay. *Beneath the Tamarind Tree: A Story of Courage, Family and the Lost Schoolgirls of Boko Haram*. New York: Harper Collins, 2019 (or)

- James J. Hentz and Hussein Solomon. *Understanding Boko Haram: Terrorism and Insurgency in Africa*. Routledge. (**Morisset Library e-resource**)

**C) On Following Traditional Gender Roles: Primary and Secondary Perspectives**

*Primary*: - Nancy Leigh DeMoss, ed. *Biblical Womanhood in the Home*. Crossway Books, 2002.

- Rachel Held Evans. *A Year of Biblical Womanhood: How a Liberated Woman found Herself Sitting on her Roof, Covering her Head, and Calling her Husband Master*, 2012 (memoir)

*Secondary*: - R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000 (**Morisset Library e-resource**) (or)

- Julie Ingersoll, *Evangelical Christian Women: War Stories in the Gender Battles*. New York: New York University Press, 2003 (or)

- Emily Hunter McGowin. *Quivering Families: The Quiverfull Movement and Evangelical Theology of the Family*. Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2018.

**D) Pope Francis on the Environment: Primary and Secondary Perspectives**

*Primary*: - Pope Francis, *Encyclical on Climate Change and Inequality: Care for our Common Home*. Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2015.

*Secondary*: - Marco Politi, *Pope Francis among the Wolves: The Inside Story of a Revolution*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015 (or)

- Paul Vallely, *Pope Francis, Untying the Knots: The Struggle for the Soul of Catholicism* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Bloomsbury, 2015.

**E) Radicalization and De-radicalization: Fact and Fiction**

*Fiction*: - John Wray. *Godsend: A Novel*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2018 (or)

- Mohsin Hamid. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Orlando: Harcourt, 2007 (or)

- Karan Mahajan. *The Association of Small Bombs*. Penguin/Random House, 2016(or).

- Omar El Akkad. *American War*. Knopf Doubleday, 2018 (novel).

*Fact*: - Farhad Khosrokhavar. *Radicalization: Why Some People Choose the Path of Violence*. The New Press, 2017 (or)

- Iain Overton. *The Price of Paradise: How the Suicide Bomber Shaped the Modern Age*. Quercus, 2019.

**F) On Radicalization and De-radicalization: Primary and Secondary Perspectives**

*Primary*: - Ed Husain. *The Islamist: Why I Joined Radical Islam in Britain, What I Saw Inside, and Why I Left*. London: Penguin Books, 2007 (memoir) (or)

*Secondary*: - Farhad Khosrokhavar. *Radicalization: Why Some People Choose the Path of Violence*, The New Press, 2017 (or)

- Asne Seierstad, *Two Sisters: A Father, his Daughters and their Journey into Syrian Jihad*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2019 (or)

- Iain Overton. *The Price of Paradise: How the Suicide Bomber Shaped the Modern Age*. Quercus, 2019 (or)

- Tany Narozhna and W. Andy Knight. *Female Suicide Bombers: A Critical Gender Approach* by (Morisset Library e-resource) (or)

- David Thomson. *The Returned: The Left to Wage Jihad, now They're back*. Polity, 2018.

### **G) Religion and the Struggle for Civil Rights in the 1960s United States: Primary and Secondary Sources**

Primary: - Martin Luther King, Jr. *Letters from Birmingham Jail* and

Secondary: - James H. Cone. *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991 (or)

- Peniel E. Joseph, *The Sword and the Shield: The Revolutionary Lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Junior*. Basic Books, 2020.

**or**

Primary: - Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. **Those picking this option may also wish to watch the classic movie Malcolm X starring Denzel Washington.**

Secondary: - James H. Cone. *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991 or

- Peniel E. Joseph, *The Sword and the Shield: The Revolutionary Lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Junior*. Basic Books, 2020.

### **H) On Spiritual Seekers: Primary and Secondary Sources**

Primary: - Rosemary Mahoney. *The Singular Pilgrim: Travels on Sacred Ground*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003 (or)

- A. J. Jacobs. *The Year of Living Biblically: One Man's Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007.

Secondary: - Richard Cimino and Don Lattin, *Shopping for Faith: American Religion in the New Millennium*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998 (or)

- Robert C. Fuller. *Spiritual, But Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America*. Oxford University Press, 2001 (Morisset Library e-resource)

### **I) On Westboro Baptist Church: Primary and Secondary Sources**

Primary: - Megan Phelps-Roper, *Unfollow: A Memoir of Loving and Leaving the Westboro Baptist Church*, 2019. **Those picking this option may also, additionally, wish to watch Phelps-Roper's TedTalk on YouTube.**

Secondary: - Rebecca Barrett-Fox, *God Hates: Westboro Baptist Church, American Nationalism, and the Religious Right*. 2016 (Morisset Library e-resource).

### **J) On "Conversion" Therapy:**

Primary: - Garrard Conley, *Boy Erased: A Memoir of Identity, Faith, and Family*. Riverhead Books, 2016.

**Those picking this option may also want to watch the feature film of the same name (e.g. Boy Erased).**

Secondary: - Wayne Bensen, *Anything But Straight: Unmasking the Scandals and lies behind the Ex-Gay Myth*. Haworth Press, 2003 (Morisset Library e-resource).

### **Assignment #2: Research Paper Proposal (10%), due Monday, September 28, 2020.**

Students are encouraged to think about topics for their Research Papers as soon as possible in the term so that they can get to work. To that end, I am asking students to write me up a formal Research Paper Proposal. This short outline should include their topic, their proposed thesis, and a bibliography of **at least five scholarly sources** (to ensure that there is enough material for a successful essay on their chosen topic). Students should await my approval of their topic before really getting down to work. If you have a topic in mind well before the September 28 deadline (or even over the summer, if they wish), please contact me via email so that you can get my approval and get to work. Please note that students who do not submit a Research Paper Proposal **will not be permitted to turn in their Research Paper**. Proposals are due via Brightspace before midnight on

Monday, September 28, 2020. More information about this assignment will be available to you in a handout posted on Brightspace.

**Assignment #3: Research Paper (30%) due Monday, November 30, 2020**

Students must research and write a twelve (12) page formal essay (independent of bibliography or footnotes) on some aspect of or movement within religion (whether conservative or liberal), spirituality, extremism, or atheism in the modern or contemporary world. The paper may examine one movement, leader, thinker, or event, or may take a comparative approach (i.e. comparing traditionalist Christian and reformist Christian perspectives on gay marriage, or atheist and reformist Jewish critiques of traditional God imagery, for example). The parameters of the paper are being kept deliberately vague so as to allow the greatest possible scope for student imagination in pursuing topics that interest them. Students wishing to examine in more depth one of the topics explored in the course (i.e. traditionalist expectations regarding the end of the world, reformer's involvement in environmental activism, atheists' ethical objections to religion) are welcome to do so, but are warned in advance that they must bring significant new research to their discussion of the issue. Re-hashing concepts and ideas discussed in class does not a research paper make! Students are encouraged to begin thinking about possible topics early in the term.

**Assignment #4: "Take Home" Final Exam (30%) due Thursday, December 17, 2020**

As this will be an online course, you will have a Take-Home Final Examination in lieu of the traditional three-hour exam written on campus. As such, the Final Exam will ask you to think back over the course's BROAD THEMES AND IDEAS, composing well-written formal essays in response to essay questions asking you to reflect upon the course's entirety. Your Final Exam questions will be posted on Brightspace, and you will submit your completed exams to Brightspace. You must do so **before midnight** on Thursday, December 17, 2020.

Late papers (without certified evidence of ill health or other compassionate consideration) will be penalized 2 marks (out of a possible 100) for each day they are late. **Plagiarism (the unattributed use of the work of others) is absolutely unacceptable and, if engaged in, may result in failure of the course and additional academic penalties. For more information on plagiarism and its consequences, see <http://www.uottawa.ca/plagiarism.pdf>.**

**Detailed Course Outline:**

Thursday, September 10, 2020:

**Introduction to SRS 3110**

This first meeting will orient students to the course by briefly introducing the themes, scope, and methodology of the course, over viewing its content and aims, answering student questions, and discussing the term's assignments.

**Section I: Religious Traditionalists: Protecting Religion from Modernity**

Monday, September 14, 2020:

**Traditionalist Views of God and Religion**

Traditionalists often have a quite "vertical," transcendent view of the human-divine relationship. They often choose to characterize the divine nature in masculine and authoritative terms like "father," "king," "judge," and "creator." Although traditionalists, when pushed, will acknowledge that God is beyond gender, they tend to resist thinking of the divine in anything other than masculine terms, and dislike gender-neutral or abstract language for God. Traditionalists stress that human beings are created by and for God, to obey and to serve him. Unlike religious reformers, who often judge divine behaviour (as with the flood, or the sacrifice of Isaac) by human standards of morality, traditionalists often argue that if God does it, then it must be right, and that it is arrogant and unseemly for humans to presume to judge God's actions. Traditionalists' view of morality tends to

be absolutist (rather than relativistic): they tend to think in terms of timeless moral rules that transcend culture. Inheritors of the more conservative and traditional strains of their respective faiths, traditionalists often have quite a pessimistic view of human nature, as sinful, imperfect, and constantly in need of divine love and forgiveness.

**Required Readings:**

- 1) J. I. Packer. *Knowing God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993, selections: “The Majesty of God,” p. 82-89, “The Grace of God,” p. 128-137, and “God the Judge,” p. 138-147.
- 2) Emma Anderson, *The Death and Afterlife of the North American Martyrs*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013, “Pilgrims’ Progress” (selection), p. 309-333 (**Morisset Library e-resource**).
- 3) Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006, Chapter 13, “Jesus Ain’t My Boyfriend,” p. 300-323.

Thursday, September 17, 2020:

**Traditionalists and the Scriptures**

Traditionalists typically see sacred scriptures as an inerrant, God-given guide, and lean toward more literalist interpretational frameworks. This tendency toward scriptural literalism in turn influences their perspective on sexuality and gender roles, and on evolution. Unlike religious reformers, traditionalists tend to see the scriptures as a “take it or leave it” proposition and strongly disapprove of interpreting the Bible or the Qu’ran in light of today’s morality, because they see it as setting up universal and eternal moral laws, given by God, that are not negotiable by humanity.

**Required Readings:**

- 1) J. I. Packer. *Knowing God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993, ‘Thy Word is Truth,’ p. 109-116.
- 2) David Zeidan, *The Resurgence of Religion: A Comparative Study of Selected Themes in Christian and Islamic Fundamentalist Discourses*, Chapter 4, “Sacred Scripture as God’s Revealed Standard and Law,” p. 128-143.
- 3) Humeira Iqtidar and David Lehman, eds. *Fundamentalist and Charismatic Movements: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*. New York: Routledge, 2012, “Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Cultural Other,” by Susan Harding, p. 203-216

Monday, September 21, 2020:

**Traditionalists and Politics**

The twentieth and twenty-first century has seen an explosion of traditionalist political power in the United States, including in our own times, under Trump, whose election victory would have been impossible without the support of white Evangelical voters. Today’s class explores how Christianity, in particular, became so intertwined with conservative politics and American nationalism south of the border.

**Required Readings:**

- 1) Kevin Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*. New York: Basic Books, 2015, “Introduction,” p. ix-xvi (**Morisset Library e-resource**).
- 2) Matthew Bowman, *Christian: The Politics of a Word in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018, “Civil Religion, the Religious Right, and the Fracturing of Christian Republicanism,” p. 186-215 (**Morisset Library e-resource**).
- 3) Gerardo Marti, “The Unexpected Orthodoxy of Donald J. Trump: White Evangelical Support for the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States,” in *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 80, #1, p. 1-8, 2019 (**Morisset Library e-resource**).
- 4) Rory McVeigh and Kevin Estep, *The Politics of Losing: Trump, the Klan, and the Mainstreaming of Resentment*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019, “Introduction,” p. 1-18, Chapter 6 “Politics and White Nationalism,” p. 125-142 (**Morisset Library e-resource**).

Thursday, September 24, 2020:

**Traditionalists on Homosexuality**

Many traditionalists, whether Jewish, Muslim, or Christian, embrace a worldview that promotes a heterosexual norm, as well as condemning any sexual activity outside of marriage. Moreover, some Christian traditionalist groups, such as “Exodus” and “Open Door” attempt to adjust individual’s sexual orientation through religiously based therapy so that they can better conform to what traditionalists regard as religious norms. At their most extreme, some traditionalist groups, such as the Westboro Baptist Church, see contemporary American acceptance of homosexuality as having led to numerous acts of divine retribution.

**Reminder:** your Research Paper Proposal is due today before midnight via Brightspace.

**Required Readings:**

- 1) James Roberts and Martyn Whittock, *Trump and the Puritans: How the Evangelical Religious Right Put Donald Trump in the White House*. London, UK: Biteback Press, 2020, Chapter 7, “Sexuality and Gender Identity.” (Morisette Library e-resource).
- 2) Rebecca Barrett-Fox, *God Hates: Westboro Baptist Church, American Nationalism, and the Religious Right*. 2016, “Cobelligerents in Antigay Activism: Westboro Baptist Church and the Religious Right.” (Morisette Library e-resource).
- 3) Tanya Erzen, “Sexual Healing: Self-Help and Therapeutic Christianity in the Ex-Gay Movement,” in Linda Barnes and Susan S. Sered, *Religion and Healing in America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 265-280. (Morisette Library e-resource).

Monday, September 28, 2020:

**Traditionalists, Marriage, and the Family**

Traditionalists generally prescribe gender-specific roles within the family that cast men as the family’s leader and breadwinner and women as the primary caregivers and homemakers. Though secularists and feminists tend to condemn such arrangements as patriarchal and old-fashioned, traditionalist women often have their own quite pointed critiques of the supposed social “advances” of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries (such as the sexual revolution of the 1960s, or women’s greater involvement in the workforce) which they argue have actually harmed rather than helped women and families. In fact, some traditionalist Muslim and Christian women have argued that their “submission” to their husbands, as well as to God, is actually spiritually empowering. In addition to promoting traditional gender roles as fulfilling and divinely mandated, traditionalists also tend to favor home schooling. Some also reject any form of birth control as contrary to the will of God, leading to large families.

**Please note: Don’t forget that your Research Paper Proposal is due today, by midnight. Please submit via Brightspace.**

**Required Readings:**

- 1) Myfanwy Franks, *Women and Revivalism in the West*. New York: Palgrave, 2001, “Marriage, Obedience, and Feminine Submission,” p. 77-101.
- 2) Laura Harrison and Sarah Rowley, “Babies by the Bundle: Gender, Backlash, and the Quiverfull Movement,” in *Feminist Formations*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring 2011), pp. 47-69 (Morisette Library e-resource).
- 3) Paula Rinehart, “Losing Our Promiscuity,” in Patricia Jung and Shannon Jung, eds., *Moral Issues and Christian Responses*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition. Belmont, CA: Thomson-Wadsworth, 2003, p. 74-82.
- 4) Karissa Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the Twentieth Century*. University of Illinois Press, 2017, Chapter 3, “Feminist Catholic Women’s Grassroots AntiAbortion Activism,” p. 56-74 (Morisette Library e-resource).
- 5) Angela Denker. *Red State Christians: Understanding the Voters who Elected Donald J. Trump*. Augsburg Fortress Press, 2019, Chapter 8, “Evangelical Women and Trump: Who’s Grabbing Whom?” p. 167-192 (Morisette Library e-resource).

## **Section II. Religious Reformers: Adapting to Modernity**

Thursday, October 1, 2020:

### **Reformers' View of God**

Reformers tend to stress God's imminence rather than his transcendence and critique the traditional anthropomorphic and authoritarian language traditionalists use to describe the divine, preferring less personal, more abstract ways of thinking about God. Some reformers downplay God's omnipotence as a way of addressing the thorny problem of evil.

#### **Required Readings:**

- 1) Steven Jacobs, *Rethinking Jewish Faith: The Child of a Survivor Responds*. State University of New York Press, p. 13-21, "The Problem with God."
- 2) Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*. New York: Harper San Francisco, 2005, Chapter 6, "God and the Purpose of Creation," p. 126-141.
- 3) John Shelby Spong, *A New Christianity for a New World: Why Traditional Faith is Dying and a How a New Faith is Being Born*. Morristown, NJ: Harper San Francisco, 2001, Chapter One, "A Place to Begin: The Old is no More, and the New is not Yet," p. 1-20, Chapter 4, "Beyond Theism but not Beyond God," p. 57-77.

Monday, October 5, 2020:

### **Reformers and the Scriptures**

Reformers' stance on the status of the scriptures as a moral and spiritual guide tends to place far more emphasis upon the human role in interpretation of the scriptures, and to stress that the times in which the scriptures were written shaped attitudes and ideas which are no longer applicable or appropriate (i.e. such as scriptural condemnations of homosexuality). In general, reformers, unlike traditionalists, are quite comfortable judging both God and the scriptures on the basis of their own independent sense of morality, interpreting scriptures in the light of contemporary morality (rather than the other way around). Reformers often argue that elements of the Bible or Quran that contravene contemporary morality must be either jettisoned, interpreted as the product of a different time, or interpreted allegorically. Generally, reformers tend to stress the *spirit* rather than the *letter* of scriptural texts (and often see key figures in their traditions, such as Moses, Jesus, or Mohammad as doing the same thing, in their own time).

#### **Required Readings:**

- 1) John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1989, "Open Commensality" and "Radical Egalitarianism" p. 66-76
- 2) Tony Campolo, *Red Letter Christians: A Citizen's Guide to Faith and Politics*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2008, Chapter 1, "Who are Red Letter Christians?" p. 21-29.
- 3) Gretta Vosper, *With or Without God: Why the Way we Live is more Important than What we Believe*. Toronto: Harper, 2008, p. 237-244.
- 4) Jonathan Goldstein, *Ladies and Gentleman, The Bible!* New York: Riverhead Books, 2009, "Noah and the Ark," p. 44-65.

Thursday, October 8, 2020:

### **Reformers and Social Justice**

Religious reformers have been critical in many of modernity's most pivotal struggles for human and civil rights. Figures like Ghandi, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr. drew inspirations from their respective religious faiths to inspire mass movements to make sweeping societal changes that changed the status of underprivileged groups. Religious reformers typically argue for their religion's greater involvement in attempting to address the human face of the persistent problems of injustice, repression, hunger, and homelessness. They suggest that scriptural admonitions to help others should play a key role in believers' everyday responsibilities. Reformers are less likely than traditionalists to stress the particularities of their faith, preferring to soft-pedal theological differences between their religious commitments and those of others in the interest of inter-religious harmony.

**Required Readings:**

- 1) James H. Cone. *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991, Chapter 5, “We Must Love our White Brothers,” p. 120-135, and chapter 6, “White Man’s Heaven is a Black Man’s Hell,” p. 151-166.
- 2) Sharon G. Thornton, “Homeless in Seattle: a Lived Religion of Hospitality,” in Jane Maynard et al, eds. *Pastoral Bearings: Lived Religion and Pastoral Theology*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010, p. 91-115.
- 3) Laura Krull, “Liberal Churches and Social Justice Movements: Analyzing the Limits of Inclusivity,” in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Volume 59, #1, 2020 (**Morisset Library e-resource**).

**\*\*\*There will be no class or office hours on Monday, October 12 2020, as it is Thanksgiving\*\*\***

Thursday, October 15, 2020:

**Reformers on Sexuality**

Key values held by religious reformers are inclusion and tolerance. Therefore, they tend to favour the extension of religious authority to those – like women and gays – who have traditionally been excluded from positions of religious leadership. Whereas traditionalists tend to justify their positions on these matters by appealing to the letter of scripture, reformers tend to present their own efforts at inclusion as being inspired by the inclusive, justice-seeking spirit of the scriptures: the counter-cultural words of the prophets, Mohammad, or Jesus. Many religious reformers see their job as being continually to challenge the larger tradition to be true to these early, counter-cultural ideals, and to fight social injustice, patriarchy, and heterosexism in their respective faiths, bringing these reformers into often sharp confrontations with religious traditionalists.

**Required Readings:**

- 1) Melissa M. Wilcox. *Coming Out in Christianity: Religion, Identity, and Community*. Bloomington, IN., 2003, Chapter 1, “Diverging Roads.”
- 2) Krista McQueeney, “We are God’s Children, Y’All: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Lesbian and Gay Affirming Congregations” in Susanne Monahan et al., eds. *Sociology of Religion: A Reader*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2011, p. 209-226.
- 3) Richard Cimino and Don Lattin, *Shopping for Faith: American Religion in the New Millenium*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998, “Women and the Changing Face of Ministry,” p. 88-94.
- 4) Isobel Coleman, *Paradise Beneath Her Feet: How Women are Transforming the Middle East*. New York: Random House, 2010, “Gender Jihad: The Rise of Islamic Feminism,” p. 32-57, 71-78.

Monday, October 19, 2020:

**Religious Reformers and the Environment**

Environmental activism is a relatively new area of religious action in the contemporary West. But even before the advent of Pope Francis, the “green pope,” reformist Jews, Christians, and Muslims, inspired by their shared religious legacy when stresses human’s status as “vice-regents” or “stewards” of God’s creation, have put forward bold new interpretations of these foundational stories which stress human responsibility for nature. Religious “greens” of all backgrounds suggest that human beings must admit that they have failed in being good stewards of the earth, and act energetically to reverse the negative effects of their own destructive activity.

**Required Reading:**

- 1) Ibrahim Abdul-Matin. *Green Deen: What Islam Teaches About Protecting the Planet*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010, “Green Muslims,” p. 46-56, “Following the Call,” p. 185-189.
- 2) Tony Watling. *Ecological Imaginations in the World Religions: An Ethnographic Analysis*. London: Continuum, 2009, Chapter 6, “Jewish Visions,” p. 123-137.
- 3) Pope Francis, *Encyclical on Climate Change and Inequality: Care for our Common Home*. Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2015, Preface, p. 3-12, “Ecological Conversion,” p. 132-135.

### **Section III. Atheists: Rejecting Religion as Incompatible with Modernity**

Thursday, October 22, 2020:

#### **Intellectual Arguments for Atheism**

While traditionalists insist upon the continuing truth and relevance of religion, and reformists seek to attune theology to the demands of modernity, atheists argue that religion is unethical and infantile, that it discourages human progress, and that it fans the flames of hatred and intolerance. Of course, religious doubt has been around for as long as religious belief. Yet publically defended atheism is a relatively recent phenomenon, one that was powerfully articulated in the writings of nineteenth-century thinkers Freud, Marx, and Durkheim.

**Please note: Don't forget that your Sources Essay is due today, by midnight. Please submit via Brightspace.**

#### **Required Readings:**

- 1) Sigmund Freud, *The Future of An Illusion*. Buffalo: Broadview Editions, 2012, p. 80-85, 92-105, 108-113.
- 2) Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. New York: The Free Press, 1965, "Conclusion," p. 466-473.
- 3) Karl Marx, "Social Principles of Christianity," p. 184-186 in *Marx on Religion* (John Raines, ed). Philadelphia: Temple University, 2002.

**\*\*\*Fall Study Break is from Saturday, October 24 to Sunday, November 1. There will thus be no classes or office hours on Monday, October 26, 2020 or Thursday, October 29, 2020\*\*\***

Monday, November 2, 2020:

#### **Atheists' Ethical Arguments Against Religion**

Although atheists reject religion, it would be a mistake to categorize atheists as being somehow "outside" contemporary religious debates. In fact, as we will see, atheists are seeking to answer many of the same questions about religion, ethics, and human nature as are religious people, though the answers which propose to these shared questions are often quite different. While atheists object to religion for a range of different reasons (some on the basis of its supposed irrationality, or its negative social and psychological consequences) one of the most popular strategies of contemporary atheists is to attack religion on the basis of its ethics. Like reformers, atheists are quite comfortable judging the divine on the basis of their own moral principles. For some atheists, biblical stories (like the flood, the sacrifice of Isaac, or even the death of Jesus) are proof positive of the immorality of the Judeo-Christian tradition. For other "reluctant atheists," it is modern historical events, such as the Holocaust or Shoah, that seem to disprove a loving or powerful divine presence in the universe.

#### **Required Readings:**

- 1) Elie Wiesel, *Against Silence: The Voice and Vision of Elie Wiesel* (ed. Irving Abrahamson). New York: Holocaust Library, 1985, "The Silence of Man and God," p. 110, "On Jewish Values in the Post-Holocaust Future," p. 203-207, "Jewish Atheist: A Quarrel with God," p. 243-244, "The Eternal Question of Suffering and Evil," p. 351-352.
- 2) Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam*. New York: Free Press, 2006, "Preface: Breaking Through the Islamic Curtain," p. ix-xviii, "Being a Politician is not my Ideal," p. 79-87.
- 3) Richard Dawkins. *The God Delusion*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006, Chapter 7, "The 'Good' Book and the Changing Moral Zeitgeist."

Thursday, November 5, 2020:

#### **Religion as Child Abuse**

One of the most powerful and controversial assertions of contemporary atheists is that traditional beliefs and practices are tantamount to child abuse. Critics point to children being indoctrinated into hating the members of other religious faiths, and note the often toxic effects of the terror induced in childish minds of hellfire and a punishing, all-seeing God, and unrealistic expectations about human behavior, particularly in the realm of sexuality. Such assertions about the nature of religion are often echoed by those who have left traditions that

they found unethical and morally tainted. Even as adults, however, many such “apostates” still report strong ongoing responses of guilt, anger, and fear in their daily lives.

**Required Readings:**

- 1) Richard Dawkins. *The God Delusion*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006, Chapter 9, “Childhood, Abuse and the Escape from Religion,” p. 311-325.
- 2) Daniel Dennett. *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*. New York: Penguin, 2006, Chapter 10, “What Shall we Tell the Children?” p. 321-328.
- 3) Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. New York, 2007, “Is Religion Child Abuse?” p. 217-228.
- 4) Shalom Auslander. *Foreskin’s Lament: A Memoir*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2007, Chapter 1, p. 1-10.
- 5) Megan Phelps-Roper, *Unfollow: A Memoir of Loving and Leaving the Westboro Baptist Church*, 2019 (section to be announced)

Monday, November 9, 2020:

**“Should I Stay?...”: Doubters Hiding in Plain Sight**

The powerful taboos against leaving the faith put many doubters in a difficult position (indeed, in some parts of the world “apostasy” or leaving the faith is actually illegal). Should doubters share their concerns or questions about their faith with the members of their families, or their religious leaders, even if doing so would imperil their place within their family, house of worship, and larger community? Or is it better to keep such issues to themselves, in essence struggling to live a “double life”? While doubters in strongly traditionalist religious communities are all in a difficult position, the evidence suggests that it may be even more excruciating for women, who in some cases risk losing access to their children should they leave the faith.

**Required Readings:**

- 1) Ayala Fader, *Hidden Heretics: Jewish Doubt in the Digital Age*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020, Chapter 1, “Life-Changing Doubt, the Internet, and a Crisis of Authority,” (section, p. 1-20), Chapter 4, “The Morality of a Married Double Life,” p. 91-120 (**Morisset Library e-resource**).
- 2) Simon Cottee, *The Apostates: When Muslims Leave Islam*. London: Hurst & Company, 2015, “Introduction,” p. 1-10, Chapter 5, “Staying In: Concealing Apostasy,” p. 117-153.

Thursday, November 12, 2020:

**“...Or Should I Go?”: De-conversion**

Many doubters feel that living a double life is intellectually dishonest, and instead opt to “come out,” despite the risks. The university years of late adolescence and early adulthood is often a period in which individuals re-evaluate the religious beliefs and practices they were raised with. For some, this period commences a particularly intense and difficult struggle – not only with divine figures, such as God, but also with family members, friends, teachers, and in some cases, their entire social network. The de-converted must adjust psychologically to living in an entirely new thought-world, cope with accusations that their actions have let down their entire community, and fight off fears that their decision to leave their faith will have negative repercussions on their earthly and eternal lives.

**Required Readings:**

- 1) Lynn Davidman and Arthur Griel. “Characters in Search of a Script: The Exit Narratives of Formerly Ultra-Orthodox Jews,” *Sociology of Religion: A Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2011, p. 24-34.
- 2) Simon Cottee, *The Apostates: When Muslims Leave Islam*. London: Hurst & Company, 2015, Chapter 4, “Coming Out: Disclosing Apostasy,” p. 79-116.
- 3) F. Elijah Dann, *Leaving Fundamentalism: Personal Stories*. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press, 2008, “My Mother, My Church,” by Margaret Steel Farrell, p. 69-80 (**Morisset Library e-resource**).
- 4) Megan Phelps-Roper, *Unfollow: A Memoir of Loving and Leaving the Westboro Baptist Church*, 2019 (section to be announced).

## **Section IV: Extremism – Violence and Religion**

Monday, November 16, 2020:

### **Is “Religious Extremism” even “Religious?” – the State of the Debate**

Even the phrase “religious extremism” is controversial. Some theorists feel that characterizing terrorist groups as “religious” gives such movements a specious respectability and implies a link with mainstream, peaceful religions, thus encouraging discrimination and religious hatred. But what are costs of *not* examining the religious imagination of violent extremists? Even if public discourse refuses to define religious extremists as such, many within terrorist movements do draw inspiration from their interpretation – however tragically distorted – of a major world religious tradition. Failure to understand the religious reasoning of extremists may thus preclude our ability to understand (and thus preclude or thwart) religiously-motivated violence.

#### **Required Readings:**

- 1) Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. Ewing, CA: The University of California Press, 2017, “The Mind of God” (**Morisset library e-resource**).
- 2) James W. Jones. *Blood That Cries Out from the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, “What Does this Tell us About Religion?” p. 143-170 (**Morisset library e-resource**).
- 3) Veronica Ward and Richard Sherlock, eds. *Religion and Terrorism: The Use of Violence in Abrahamic Monotheism*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014, Chapter 5, “How Religious is “Islamic” Religious Terrorism?” by John David Payne, Donna Lee Bowen et al, p. 119-142.

Thursday, November 19, 2020:

### **The Process of Radicalization**

How do ordinary people become seduced into the world of extremism? There are, of course, those who are born into families who hold radical views, but most “soldiers of God” are made, not born. What are the factors that make extremist views not only coherent but attractive to those who convert to them? Are there discernible stages of radicalization? How can radicalization be arrested, and reversed?

#### **Required Readings:**

- 1) James W. Jones. *Blood That Cries Out from the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, “Introduction: Religion, Psychology, and Terrorism.” (**Morisset library e-resource**).
- 2) Arie Kruglanski et al. *The Three Pillars of Radicalization: Needs, Narratives, and Networks*, 2019, Chapter 3, “The Significance Quest Theory of Radicalization.” New York: Oxford University Press, 2019 (**Morisset library e-resource**).
- 3) Raffaello Pantucci, “*We Love Death as You Love Life:*” *Britain’s Suburban Terrorists*. London: Hurst & Company, 2015, “Radicalisation,” p. 6-17.
- 4) Fathali M. Moghaddam, *Mutual Radicalization: How Groups and Nations Drive each Other to Extremes*. American Psychological Association, 2018, “Introduction: Radicalization and Conflict in Global Context,” p. 3-18 (**Morisset Library e-resource**).

Monday, November 23, 2020:

### **“Christian” Extremism, White Supremacy, and Anti-Abortion Violence**

Christian extremist groups tend to mobilize around two issues: abortion and race. Founded in the aftermath of the American Civil War, the Ku Klux Klan links (Protestant) Christianity to white supremacy, promoting a bloody campaign of violence and intimidation against African Americans, Catholics, and Jews. Abortion is also a flashpoint for extremist Christian violence in the United States. *Roe v. Wade*, seen as many as illegitimately legalizing murder, has led many “soldiers of God” to take the law into their own hands and, ironically, to attempt to reinforce their message of the sanctity of life through the murder of abortion doctors.

#### **Required Readings:**

- 1) Neil J. Kressel, *Bad Faith: The Danger of Religious Extremism*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007, “The Army of God: Christian Terrorists,” p. 91-108.

2) Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Chapter 2, “Soldiers for Christ” (**Morisset Library e-resource**).

3) James Roberts and Martyn Whittock, *Trump and the Puritans: How the Evangelical Religious Right Put Donald Trump in the White House*. London, UK: Biteback Press, 2020, Chapter 5, “The Politics of Race” (**Morisset Library e-resource**).

Thursday, November 26, 2020:

### **“Islamic” Terrorism**

Groups such as ISIS, Al Quida, and Boko Haram tend to present their struggle in religious terms, as that of a righteous minority courageously combatting a fallen, decadent world (though their detractors often see their appeals to the Quran as specious and cynical mask for overtly political goals). This unit focuses on understanding how Islamic terrorists envision and justify their deadly fusion of religion with violence, and analyzes its fatal effects, often on other Muslims.

#### **Required Readings:**

1) James W. Jones. *Blood That Cries Out from the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, “Jihadism in Comparative Perspective: Psychological Themes in Religiously Motivated Terrorism,” p. 29-71 (**Morisset Library e-resource**).

2) Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, “Modern Islamic Justifications for Violence,” p. 98-102 (**Morisset Library e-resource**).

3) James J. Hentz and Hussein Solomon. *Understanding Boko Haram: Terrorism and Insurgency in Africa*. Routledge, 2017, Chapter 2, “Boko Haram: A Jihadist Enigma in Nigeria” by Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos (**Morisset Library e-resource**)

Monday, November 30, 2020:

### **Women and Violent Extremism:**

Despite the often extremely traditional views of gender roles held by Christian and Muslim terrorists alike, women are playing an increasingly crucial role in orchestrated campaigns of terror worldwide, for both strategic and ideological reasons. However, commonly held preconceptions about women’s putatively “gentle,” “maternal,” and “compassionate” natures has often handicapped our ability to understand these women’s motivations for engaging in violence by presenting them as pawns, dupes, or victims, rather than facing the terrible fact that women, just like men, are capable of instigating violent acts that are stupefying in their scale and havoc. **Please note: Don’t forget that your Research Paper is due today by midnight. Please submit through Brightspace.**

#### **Required Readings:**

1) Karissa Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the Twentieth Century*. “Women and Lethal Violence in the Anti-Abortion Movement, p. 100-136 (**Morisset Library e-resource**).

2) Tany Narozhna and W. Andy Knight. *Female Suicide Bombers: A Critical Gender Approach*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016, Chapter 3, “Female Suicide Bombings: Between Agential Choice and Structural Determinism,” p. 107-134 (**Morisset Library e-resource**).

3) Asne Seierstad, *Two Sisters: A Father, his Daughters and their Journey into Syrian Jihad* (section to be announced)

## **Section V. Spiritual Seekers: Chasing Religion**

Thursday, December 3, 2020:

### **“Secularization” or “Spirituality?”**

Until a generation ago, most sociologists were emphatic proponents of the “secularization hypothesis,” which posited that the world was becoming ever more secular as religion globally declined in importance. But when subsequent events (such as the Iranian Revolution of 1979 or the rise of the religious right in the United States) proved the ongoing relevance of religiosity, new theories developed that suggests that religion is not so much

declining as it is morphing. The familiar contemporary phrase, “I’m spiritual, not religious” intimates the strong current trend toward non-authoritarian forms of religious practice that supports individual choices and is tolerant of other religious perspectives.

**Required Readings:**

- 1) N. J. Demerath III. “Secularization and Sacralization Deconstructed and Reconstructed,” in *Sociology of Religion: A Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2011, p. 265-277.
- 2) Richard Cimino and Don Lattin, *Shopping for Faith: American Religion in the New Millennium*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998, Chapter 1, “The Divorce Between Spirituality and Religion,” p. 9-16 and Chapter 2, “Varieties of Spirituality,” p. 17-30.
- 3) Laurel Zwissler, *Religious, Feminist, Activist: Cosmologies of Interconnection*. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2018, “Spirituality as Feminist Third Choice,” p. 125-158 (**Morisset Library e-resource**).

Monday, December 7, 2020:

**Spiritual Seekers within Western Monotheism**

Spiritual seekers, as the name suggests, are on a quest for religious meaning. While some turn to new religious movements or the religions of the east, other seekers choose instead to re-examine religions with which they may have a strong family connection (often the very traditions that they themselves fell away from during an earlier chapter in their lives). Important life events such as the failure of a relationship, becoming a parent, or enduring the illness or death of a loved one can often act as a catalyst for these spiritual quests.

**Required Readings:**

- 1) Richard Cimino and Don Lattin, *Shopping for Faith: American Religion in the New Millennium*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998, “Traditional Congregations and Worship Wars,” p. 67-71.
- 2) A. J. Jacobs. *The Year of Living Biblically: One Man’s Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007, “Introduction,” p. 3-7, 48-56, 327-332.
- 3) Rosemary Mahoney. *The Singular Pilgrim: Travels on Sacred Ground*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003, “Introduction,” p. 1-7, “Lourdes,” p. 54-73.

Wednesday, December 9, 2020:

**Turning Eastwards - Spiritual Seekers and Eastern Religions**

While some spiritual seekers explore their own inherited faiths, for many religious questing implies the “novel” and the “exotic.” Some analysts argue that wholesale shifts in western culture have made traditional Eastern religious beliefs and values more familiar and valued than traditional western values. This section will explore this Western “turn to the east” and how, in the process of exploring Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, and other eastern faiths, westerners have profoundly transformed Eastern faiths to serve their own purposes.

**Required Readings:**

- 1) Robert C. Fuller. *Spiritual, But Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America*. Oxford University Press, 2001, Chapter 3, “Exotic Messages, Familiar Themes,” p. 75-87. (**Morisset library e-resource**).
- 2) Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West*, Chapter 6, “The Easternization of the West” selections, p. 118-124, 131-139.

Thursday, December 17, 2020:

**Your Take-Home Exam is due by midnight, via Brightspace**