

FAITH AND CRITICAL REASON
THEO 1000 R11
Dr. Kathryn Reklis
SUMMER SESSION I – 2018
1:00-4:00 p.m.

Contact Information

kreklis@fordham.edu

917.587.0874 (c)

Office: Duane 134

Office Hours: Wednesdays 12:00-1:00pm and by appointment

Course Summary:

This course explores a variety of theoretical, philosophical, and religious reflections on the meanings of modern religiosity. We will encounter a range of European and American attempts to think about religion as a part of life in the modern west. We will explore the evolving and trenchant critiques of religion, the shifting categories of “good” and “bad” religion, and the creative innovations, transformations, and adaptations inside religious traditions. Our authors include Protestants, Catholics, Buddhists, Muslims, atheists, and self-described “spiritual” seekers. We will explore their diagnoses of the human predicament and compare the ways they answer fundamental questions of meaning and authority. Along the way we will learn to assess religion from multiple vantage points, as both citizens and as scholars.

This course will make use of the entire second and third seasons of the HBO television drama *The Leftovers* as a framing device for our discussions. During every class session we will watch one episode of the television series together. The themes of the show will be reflected in the readings we do together, though not every reading on every day will correspond neatly to the theme of that day’s episode. In addition to using the show as a means to reflect on fundamental questions about religious meaning, belief, practice, ritual, authority, and coherence, we will also discuss as a class how popular culture itself becomes an important site for making and exploring “religion” in the late modern world.

Students will also be asked to reflect—using course readings and their own life experiences as an essential dual springboard—on their own understandings of the meanings of religious thought and practice.

Course Goals:

- Develop an understanding of various theological, philosophical, and theoretical approaches to the meanings and limits of modern religiosity
- Build knowledge of religions as they have shaped and been shaped by social, cultural, and intellectual developments in the modern West
- Gain tools for critical and empathetic understanding of different religious life-worlds
- Reflect critically and openly on inherited conceptions of religion and its practice
- Critically engage visual and popular culture through the lens of religious studies
- Improve skills in reading, oral analysis and discussion, and analytical writing

COURSE REQUIREMENTS/ASSIGNMENTS

Class Participation (15%)

Attendance will be taken daily. Good participation includes: taking part in class discussion, active listening of lecture/discussion, commenting on assigned texts, offering constructive advice to peers, asking questions, not violating class order. Your attendance and your active participation in class discussion are essential. You are expected to have done all the assigned reading for each class session and to come to class (with the readings in hand) having formulated specific questions and/or observations about the reading that you are ready to discuss. At the start of most class sessions we may also engage in brief writing exercises, mini quizzes, or small group conversation, all of which also constitutes part of your participation. Simply attending every class session with your printed readings will earn a grade of C+ reflecting the average expectations for this category. Because this is a summer class with a condensed schedule, missing one class is the equivalent to missing an entire week during the regular semester.

Discussion Questions (10%)

Each student will sign up for one class session for which he or she is required to write one discussion question for the class. These questions can address material from the immediate class proceeding or from the material for the day at hand (e.g. if a student signs up for Tuesday, June 5 11, she can write questions about what we are scheduled to read/watch/discuss on June 5 OR what we read/discussed on Thursday, May 31). More than one student will be assigned for each day. You do not have to coordinate with the other students assigned for your day. Think about your questions carefully! Questions that show careful engagement with the material and press into more interpretative directions are more valuable than clarifying questions (e.g. “Does Harry Potter’s death and return to life force us to think differently about the standard interpretation of Jesus’ saving death?” is a better question than “Why does Harry Potter die and come back to life?”). If there are not many different ways to answer your question or you cannot imagine people really debating it, scratch it and try again. **Questions must be emailed to the professor by 9am the day for which the student signed up.**

***The Leftovers* Review (20%)**

All students will write a 1000-word review of the television show *The Leftovers*. The review must situation the show in relation to broader themes about religious belief and practice as explored in our readings and class discussions. More instructions and further discussion of the assignment will be given in class.

Midterm Exam (25%)

There will be an in class, closed book essay exam on Tuesday, July 25.

Final Exam (30%)

There will be an closed book take home essay exam due in hard copy at the start of class on Thursday, June 28.

CLASS POLICIES

Classroom Technology: It is well documented through controlled studies that people believe they are capable of multitasking more than they actually are. In order to reduce distractions and the need to toggle between the many demands in your life, laptops, tablets, smartphones, or any

other means of accessing the wired, digital universe are not allowed in class. **Students are expected to print out all readings and to take notes by hand. If this presents a serious financial or learning challenge, please speak to me privately.**

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 me as soon as possible – do not wait until the day an assignment is due. No extensions are allowed for exams unless a formal extension is petitioned and granted by your Class Dean and in these rare cases a make-up exam will be arranged.

Academic Honesty: All papers and examinations must adhere to Fordham University's policies regarding academic integrity (please see the Student Handbook). Any infractions of those policies will be subject to the sanctions listed there (a failing grade for any plagiarized assignments, a formal report of the incident submitted to the Dean, possible suspension from the course based on the Dean's evaluation, and expulsion from Fordham if this is your second such offense at the university). Please talk with me if you have any questions or doubts about the academic integrity of any of your work.

ADA Notice: Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of Fordham University. If you believe that you have a disabling condition that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, course work, or assessment of the object of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please schedule an appointment to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services (Rose Hill – O'Hare Hall, Lower Level, x0655 or at Lincoln Center – Room 207, x6282).

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990 (reprint)), ISBN: 978-0385073059
- Kathryn Lofton, *Consuming Religion* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), ISBN: 978-0-226-48193-7

Please note: there are many other assigned readings that will be provided on Blackboard. All of these readings are marked with double asterisk (**) in the Schedule of Readings below.

Schedule of Readings/Assignments

- Tuesday, May 29: course introductions, themes, methods, texts
 - WATCH (in class):
 - *The Leftovers*, S1 E10: "The Prodigal Son Returns"
 - READ (before class):
 - Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, chapter 1
- Wednesday, May 30: Meaning and Order
 - WATCH (in class): *The Leftovers*, S2 E1: "Axis Mundi"
 - READ (before class):

- Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, chapter 2
- Thursday, May 31: Evil, Self, and Society
 - WATCH (in class): *The Leftovers* S2 E2: “A Matter of Geography”
 - READ (before class):
 - Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, chapters 3 and 4
- Tuesday, June 5: Violence, Tolerance, and Religion of Reason
 - WATCH (in class): *The Leftovers* S2 E3: “Off Ramp”
 - READ (before class);
 - **John Locke, “Faith and Reason,” and “On Enthusiasm” from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690)
 - **Francois-Marie Arouet de Voltaire, “The Ecclesiastical Ministry,” “Faith,” “Religion,” “Sect,” “Superstition,” and “Tolerance” from *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764) - <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18569/18569-h/18569-h.htm>
- Wednesday, June 6: Miracles and Illusions
 - WATCH (in class): *The Leftovers* S2 E4: “Orange Sticker”
 - READ (before class):
 - **Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (selections)
- Thursday, June 7: Martyrs and Saints
 - WATCH (in class): *The Leftovers* S2 E5: “No Room at the Inn”
 - READ (before class):
 - **Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul: The Encounter of Catholics and Cannibals in Sixteenth-Century Brazil*, Part I
- Tuesday, June 12: Conversion and Authority
 - WATCH (in class):
 - *The Leftovers* S2 E6: “Lens”
 - *The Leftovers* S2 E7: “A Most Powerful Adversary”
 - READ (before class):
 - **Jarena Lee, from “The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee” (1836) in *African-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness*
- Wednesday, June 13: Selfhood and Agency
 - WATCH (in class): *The Leftovers* S2 E8: “International Assassin”
 - READ (before class):
 - **Ayya Khema, *Who Is My Self? A Guide to Buddhist Meditation*, chapters 1, 2, 11, and 12
 - MIDTERM REVIEW
- Thursday, June 14: **MIDTERM EXAM (essay exam in class)**
- Tuesday, June 19: Prophets and Doom
 - WATCH (in class): *The Leftovers* S2 E9: “Ten Thirteen”
 - READ (before class):

- ** Omid Safi, *Memories of Muhammad*, selections TBD
- Wednesday, June 20: Borders and Belonging
 - WATCH (in class): *The Leftovers* S2 E10: “I Live Here Now”
 - READ (before class):
 - **Lee Yearley, “New Religious Virtues” (lecture at Arizona State University)
- Thursday, June 21: Religion Everywhere
 - READ (before class): selections from Kathryn Lofton, *Consuming Religion* (TBD)
 - WATCH (in class):
 - *The Leftovers*, S3, E1: “The Book of Kevin”
 - *The Leftovers*, S3, E2: “Don’t Be Ridiculous”
- Tuesday, June 26: Religion, Power, and Consumerism
 - READ (before class)
 - Selections from Kathryn Lofton, *Consuming Religion* (TBD)
 - WATCH (in class)
 - *The Leftovers*, S3, E3: “Crazy Whitefella Thinking”
 - *The Leftovers*, S3, E4: “G’Day Melbourne”
- Wednesday, June 27: “Nothing More Dangerous Than a Man Who Doesn’t Believe in Anything”
 - READ (before class):
 - Clay Routledge, “Don’t Believe in God? Maybe You’ll Try UFOs,” *The New York Times*, July 21, 2017
 (https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/21/opinion/sunday/dont-believe-in-god-maybe-youll-try-ufos.html?_r=0)
 - David Foster Wallace, “Transcription of the Kenyon Commencement Address, 2005”
 - WATCH (in class):
 - *The Leftovers*, S3, E5: “It’s a Matt, Matt, Matt, Matt World”
 - *The Leftovers*, S3, E6: “Certified”
- Thursday, June 28: This Is How It Ends
 - **ALL FINAL ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE at the start of class (hardcopy/printed)**
 - WATCH (in class):
 - *The Leftovers*, S3, E7: “The Most Powerful Man In The World (and His Identical Twin Brother)”
 - *The Leftovers*, S3, E8: “The Book of Nora”