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Office Hours: Wednesdays 4:00-6:00pm via Zoom
and by appointment via Zoom

FAITH AND CRITICAL REASON
THEO 1000, R11
Dr. Kathryn Reklis
SUMMER SESSION I – 2020 – Online
Tuesday, Wednesdays: 6:00-7:30pm (via Zoom)
Thursdays: additional online work
**Course Summary:**
The goal of this course is to explore different theories of religion in the modern world from theological, sociological, and philosophical perspectives and to analyze the value and limits of those theories when they are applied to lived experience of religious belief and practice.

In other words, we will ask: how have various people inside and outside religious traditions tried to explain what religion is and what it does for modern people and do those theories actually make sense of how people experience whatever they call “religion”?

We will encounter a range of European and American attempts to think about religion as a part of life in the modern west, both as critics “outside” religious traditions and as modern practitioners “inside” them. We will explore how different authors 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. That means that one of your main “texts” will be watching this show and analyzing it. We will use characters and themes from the show as a means to reflect on fundamental questions about religious meaning, belief, practice, ritual, authority, and coherence.

**Course Goals:**
- Describe how different theories of religion explain what religion is and what it does for human actors and societies
- Compare theories of religion to lived religious experience by analyzing first person accounts of religious belief and practice
- Analyze the usefulness and the limitations of various theories when they are applied to lived experience
- Reflect critically and openly on inherited conceptions of religion and its practice
- Critically engage visual and popular culture through the lens of religious studies

**HOW THIS COURSE WILL MEET**
This is a fully online summer school course. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays we will meet synchronously (at the same time via Zoom video conferencing) for 1.5 hours each day from 6-7:30pm (see schedule below). Please make sure to come to our video conferencing having done all the assignments listed under that session (usually a reading assignment and watching episodes of our HBO show – read on for more info!). You can do this work anytime (including over the weekend) just so long as you have done all of it before we meet on Zoom. On Thursdays, you will have additional assignments you can complete on your own time any time before the following Monday.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS/ASSIGMENTS**

**Class Participation (15%)**
Attendance will be taken for every Zoom call and your participation in all online activities (e.g. discussion boards, VoiceThreads, etc) will also form part of your participation grade. 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 (e.g. keeping your Zoom muted when you are not talking, asking respectful, on topic questions or making respectful, on topic comments). Your attendance and your active participation in class discussion are essential. You are expected to have done all the assignments for each Zoom session and to come to our Zoom discussions having formulated specific questions and/or observations about the reading or television episodes that you are ready to discuss. During each Zoom session we may also engage in brief writing exercises, mini quizzes, or small group conversation, all of which also constitutes part of your participation. Your full participation in the online component of this class is also expected. 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.

**ONLINE Modules: VoiceThreads, Discussion Boards, and Short Writing Assignments (30%)**

On Thursdays our class will not meet via Zoom, but will engage each other via different tools on Blackboard. Each week there will be special online assignments –commenting on a VoiceThread, posting on an online discussion board, or submitting a short writing assignment. All of these assignments will be graded but none of them are designed to be “right or wrong” assignments. You can earn full credit for thoughtful, engaged responses that show you are thinking through the ideas of the class.

**Midterm Exam (25%)**

There will be an online, open book essay exam posted on Thursday, June 11 and due on Monday, June 15 at 8am.

**Final Exam (30%)**

There will be an online open book essay exam due on Thursday, June 25 and due on Friday, June 26 at 8am.

**CLASS POLICIES**

**Classroom Technology**: It is well documented through controlled studies that people believe they are capable of multitasking more than they actually are. Obviously, when we meet via Zoom you will be using a computer, tablet, or phone to engage the class. Please avoid logging in to other sites or devices while we are meeting (that means no checking Insta or answering emails during class discussion). Please turn your video on for all Zoom sessions. If there is ever a good reason why you cannot have your video on, please email me privately. Otherwise, we will plan to see each other’s faces and hear each other’s voices every day we are on Zoom. On the other hand, please mute yourself completely when you are not speaking to keep background noise to a minimum.

**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. However, we all know we are living in exceptional circumstances, so if you become ill, are caring for an ill person, or face other difficult or extenuating circumstances, please be in touch with me as soon as possible. I am very willing to work with all of you around unexpected delays or difficulties, but the key is to stay in communication with each other.

**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. **There is no need to consult any outside reading (beyond the syllabus) for this course and you can greatly limit your chance of plagiarism by only reading and watching what is assigned!**

**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**

Please note: all assigned readings will be provided on Blackboard as PDF documents under the module for which they are assigned. The only assigned “text” for this class is the HBO television show *The Leftovers*. **You will be responsible for watching the entirety of seasons 2 and 3 on your own and ALL of our class discussions and assignments will reference these episodes.** If you have an HBO/HBO Go/HBO Now subscription, you already have access to these shows. You can purchase a one month subscription via HBO Now or via Amazon Prime Channels for approximately $15-20 for the month. You can also purchase individual episodes or seasons on streaming platforms such as Amazon and iTunes. **Please let me know right away if you are having any trouble with access.**

**Schedule of Readings/Assignments**

*Please note: all materials needed for each day can be found on Blackboard under each Module.*

**Before Class Begins (sometime during the week before our class begins):**
- **WATCH:**
  - Getting Started Video on Blackboard to learn about the online tools we will use together
- **DISCUSS:**
  - Practicing leaving a VoiceThread discussing what you think religion is and how we can study it in a university classroom.

**Week One/Module One: Sacred Legitimations**
- **ZOOM Meeting Tuesday, May 26, 6:00-8:00p.:** Course Introductions + the Social Order of Reality *(please note: this is the ONLY class that will meet for 2 hours)*
  - READ (before class):
    - Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, chapter 1
  - WATCH (before class):
    - Video lecture on *The Leftovers*
o DISCUSS (in class):
  ▪ What does Berger mean when he says humans make society and society makes humanity?

o WATCH (in class):
  ▪ *The Leftovers*, S1 E10: “The Prodigal Son Returns” (note we will watch this together via Zoom screen share – you do not need to watch ahead of time)

➤ ZOOM Meeting Wednesday, May 27, 6:00-7:30pm: Meaning and Order
  o READ (before class):
    ▪ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, chapter 2
  o WATCH (before class):
    ▪ Video lecture on “Legitimations”
  o WATCH (before class):
    ▪ *The Leftovers*, S2 E1: “Axis Mundi”
    ▪ *The Leftovers* S2 E2: “A Matter of Geography”
  o DISCUSS (in class):
    ▪ How do legitimations hold the meaning of society in place? Why are religious legitimations the strongest kind of legitimation, according to Berger?
    ▪ What kind of legitimations do characters on *The Leftovers* offer to try and explain their new reality?

➤ Thursday, May 28: ONLINE ONLY – please complete all assignments before Monday, June 1 at 8am
  o WATCH (on your own):
    ▪ *The Leftovers* S2 E3: “Off Ramp”
  o DISCUSS (online):
    ▪ VoiceThread: In “Off Ramp” we watch Laurie and Tom try to offer legitimations to the people they are rescuing from the Guilty Remnant. What explanations does Laurie offer the woman in her support group? Why do you think that those explanations do not help the woman? Do you think Laurie believes them herself? Why or why not?

**Week Two/Module Two: Sacred Space and Religious Illusions**

➤ ZOOM Meeting Tuesday, June 2, 6:00-7:30pm: Sacred Space and the Center of Meaning
  o WATCH (before class):
    ▪ Video lecture: Introduction to Mircea Eliade
  o READ (before class):
    ▪ **Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and Profane*, selections**
  o WATCH (before class):
    ▪ *The Leftovers* S2 E4: “Orange Sticker” and
    ▪ *The Leftovers* S2 E5 “No Room at the Inn”
  o DISCUSS (in class):
    ▪ What does Eliade mean by an “axis mundi” and how does it help people organize themselves in relation to sacred space?
How does Eliade’s discussion of sacred space help us understand Matt’s attachment to Jarden/Miracle? How does Matt’s attitude to Miracle differ from John’s attitude?

ZOOM Meeting Wednesday, June 3, 6:00-7:30pm: Miracles and Illusions
- WATCH (before class):
  - Video lecture “Introduction to Freud”
- READ (before class):
  - Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (selections)
- WATCH (before class):
  - *The Leftovers* S2 E6: “Lens”
- DISCUSS (in class):
  - What makes something an illusion for Freud? Does this mean it is necessarily false?
  - How might Nora’s behavior model Freud’s concerns about what it is reasonable to believe and what is an illusion?

Thursday, June 4: ONLINE ONLY: Please complete all assignments by Monday, June 8 at 8am
- WATCH (on your own):
  - *The Leftovers* S2 E7: “A Most Powerful Adversary”
- WRITE (online):
  - Short writing assignment (write directly on Blackboard; 1-2 paragraphs): Reflect on Laurie’s speech to Kevin in the hotel room. How does this speech model Freud’s theory of religion as an illusion? Remember that it is not enough that Kevin thinks strange things are happening to him – strange things are happening to everyone in this show! What in particular does Freud think makes something an illusion? Is this the same thing Laurie is saying to Kevin? Finally, what do you make of the fact that Kevin ignores Laurie’s advice?

Week Three/Module Three: Reason and Faith (plus Midterm)

ZOOM Meeting Tuesday, June 9, 6:00-7:30pm: Reason and the Limits of Faith
- WATCH (before class):
  - Video lecture: Introduction to John Locke
- READ (before class):
  - John Locke, “Faith and Reason” from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690)
- WATCH (before class):
  - *The Leftovers* S2 E8: “International Assassin”
- DISCUSS (in class):
  - What is “faith” for John Locke? How is it different than reason? What justifies taking something on faith for Locke?
  - In the alternative world of this episode, Senator Patti Levine gives Kevin a speech about why it is reasonable to reject all forms of human love and
attachment. Would Locke agree that this is reasonable? Is love something we have to take on faith, in Locke’s terms?

- **ZOOM Meeting Wednesday, June 10, 6:00-7:30pm: Midterm Review**
  - **WATCH (before class):**
    - *The Leftovers* S2 59: “Ten Thirteen”
    - *The Leftovers* S2 E10 “I Live Here Now”
  - **DISCUSS:** (in class)
    - What did you make of the season 2 finale? What motivates Meg’s actions? What do our characters learn about themselves? Do these episodes add anything to our understanding of religion that has not been covered in our readings/dischussions so far?
    - **MIDTERM REVIEW:** make sure you have a strong understanding of the major ideas from our readings so far:
      - Berger’s theory of society and legitimations
      - Eliade’s theory of the “axis mundi” and sacred space
      - Freud’s theory of illusions
      - Locke’s understanding of faith

- **Thursday, June 11: ONLINE ONLY – Please complete midterm exam by Monday, June 15 at 8am.**
  - **MIDTERM EXAM (essay exam online)**

**Week Four/Module Four: Being Religious, Being Modern**

- **Zoom Meeting Tuesday, June 16, 6:00-7:30pm: Belief in the Modern Age**
  - **WATCH (before class):**
    - Video lectures “Introduction to Reading Theological texts” and “(Super Brief) Introduction to Christianity”
  - **READ (before class):**
    - Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, p. 1-24
  - **WATCH (before class):**
    - *The Leftovers* S3 E1: “The Book of Kevin”
    - *The Leftovers* S3 E2 “Don’t Be Ridiculous”
  - **DISCUSS** (in class):
    - How does Johnson describe the quest for understanding that marks being religions for her? How does she think this is different than “modern” understandings of “God” or “belief”?
    - Which characters most embody the quest for understanding that Johnson thinks is at the heart of being Christian (or religious more generally)? Can Johnson help us understand why Matt and John are writing a new “gospel” based on Kevin’s life? What role do religious texts play in making religious meaning and where do those texts come from?

- **ZOOM Meeting Wednesday, June 17, 6:00-7:30pm: Religious Difference, Religious Conflict**
  - **WATCH (before class):**
Video lecture: “(Super Brief) Introduction to Islam”

- READ (before class):
  - Omid Safi, *Memories of Muhammad*, chapter 4

- WATCH (before class):
  - *The Leftovers* S3 E3: “Crazy White Fella Thinking”
  - *The Leftovers* S3 E4 “G’Day Melbourne”

- DISCUSS (in class):
  - How does Safi help us understand differences between Jews, Christians, Muslims, and other religious people from a Muslim perspective?
  - Does this way of thinking about religious difference and religious conflict help us understand Kevin Sr.’s quest to create his own religious miracle?

Thursday, June 18: ONLINE ONLY – Please complete all assignments by Monday, June 22 at 8am

- WATCH (on your own):
  - *The Leftovers*, S3, E5: “It's a Matt, Matt, Matt, Matt World”

- DISCUSS (online):
  - Discussion Board: In this episode, Matt meets a man named David Burton who claims to be God. We (as viewers) have seen this man before but Matt has never seen him nor heard of him. Use the discussion board to respond to each other's posts to discuss/debate the following:
    - Where have we seen David Burton before? What do you think we, as viewers, are supposed to make of his character – especially his claims to be God – given where and how he shows up across the series? In other words, do you think the show wants us to take him seriously? Why or why not?
    - Why does David Burton make Matt so mad? What do we learn about Matt’s own experience of religion and his ideas about God from this encounter?

**Week Five/Module Five: Losing the Self, Making the Self + Final Exam**

- ZOOM Meeting Tuesday, June 23, 6:00-7:30pm: What is the Self?
  - WATCH (before class):
    - Video Lecture: “(Super Brief) Introduction to Buddhism”
  - READ (before class)
  - WATCH (before class)
    - *The Leftovers*, S3, E6: “Certified”
  - DISCUSS (in class)
    - Khema suggests that true knowledge and therefore true wisdom and happiness comes from realizing there is no “self.” Since this is a paradox and cannot be achieved easily, how does she suggest we start the path toward this truth?
    - Could Khema’s teaching apply to any of the characters in *The Leftovers*?

- ZOOM Meeting Wednesday, June 24, 6:00-7:30pm: Everything Ends
o WATCH (before 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”

o DISCUSS (in class):
  ▪ Wrap up discussion of *The Leftovers*: what did you make of the ending? Do we believe Nora? Does it matter?
  ▪ Final Exam Review: you will be asked to create your own theory of religion based on *The Leftovers* (assuming that this show is true) based on the texts from this class. What ideas from our texts do you want to discuss with peers before you begin writing?

➢ Thursday, June 25: ONLINE ONLY – Please complete final exam by **FRIDAY, June 26 at 8am**

  o FINAL EXAM (essay exam online)