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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. We will watch the show in class and independently outside of class. 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

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. 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 meet online instead of in person. 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 due on Thursday, June 11

Final Exam (30%)
There will be an online open book essay exam due on Thursday, June 25

CLASS POLICIES
Classroom Technology: It is well documented through controlled studies that people believe they are capable of multitasking more than they actually are. Even though we have an online component to this class, when we meet in person, laptops, tablets, smartphones, or any other means of accessing the wired, digital universe are not allowed in class. You will, of course, use electronic devices to log on and complete the online component every Thursday. 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. medical/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. 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 simply 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**

- Episodes of the HBO show *The Leftovers*: we will watch many of these episodes in class each week, but all students will be expected to watch at least one episode on their own most weeks. If you do not have a subscription to HBO you can buy each episode on Amazon, iTunes, or other media outlets for approximately $2.00/episode.

*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**

**Week One: Sacred Legitimations**

- **Tuesday, May 26: Course Introductions + the Social Order of Reality**
  - READ (before class):
    - Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, chapter 1
  - WATCH (in class):
    - *The Leftovers*, S1 E10: “The Prodigal Son Returns”
  - DISCUSS (in class):
    - What does Berger mean when he says humans make society and society makes humanity?

- **Wednesday, May 27: Meaning and Order**
  - READ (before class):
    - Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, chapter 2
  - WATCH (in class):
  - 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?

- **Thursday, May 28: ONLINE MODULE #1 (instructions and tools on Blackboard)**
  - WATCH (on your own):
    - *The Leftovers* S2 E3: “Off Ramp”
  - 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: Sacred Space and Religious Illusions

- Tuesday, June 2: Sacred Space and the Center of Meaning
  - READ (before class):
    - **Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and Profane, selections**
  - WATCH (in class):
    - The Leftovers S2 E4: “Orange Sticker” and S2 E5 “No Room at the Inn”
  - DISCUSS (in class):
    - 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?

- Wednesday, June 3: Miracles and Illusions
  - READ (before class):
    - **Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion (selections)**
  - WATCH (in class):
    - The Leftovers S2 E6: “Lens”
  - DISCUSS (in class):
    - 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 MODULE #2
  - 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: Reason and Faith (plus Midterm)

- Tuesday, June 9: Reason and the Limits of Faith
  - READ (before class):
    - **John Locke, “Faith and Reason” from An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690)**
  - WATCH (in class):
The Leftovers S2 E8: “International Assassin”

DISCUSS (in class):
- 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?

Wednesday, June 10: Midterm Review

- WATCH (in class):
  - The Leftovers S2 59: “Ten Thirteen” and S2 E10 “I Live Here Now”
- MIDTERM REVIEW (in class)

Thursday, June 11: ONLINE MODULE #3

- MIDTERM EXAM (essay exam online)

Week Four: Being Religious, Being Modern

Tuesday, June 16: Belief in the Modern Age

- READ (before class):
  - **Elizabeth Johnson, Quest for the Living God, p. 1-24
- WATCH (in class):
  - The Leftovers S3 E1: “The Book of Kevin” and S3 E2 “Don’t Be Ridiculous”
- DISCUSS (in class):
  - 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?

Wednesday, June 17: Religious Difference, Religious Conflict

- READ (before class):
  - ** Omid Safi, Memories of Muhammad, chapter 4
- WATCH (in class):
  - The Leftovers S3 E3: “Crazy White Fella Thinking” and 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 MODULE #4

- 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: Losing the Self, Making the Self

- Tuesday, June 23: What is the Self?
  - READ (before class)
  - WATCH (in 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?

- Wednesday, June 24: Everything Ends
  - WATCH (before class): S3 E7 “The Most Powerful Man in the World (and His Identical Twin Brother)”
  - WATCH (in class): The Leftovers, S3 E8: “The Book of Nora”
  - DISCUSS (in class):
    - Wrap up
    - Final Exam Review

- Thursday, June 25: ONLINE MODULE #5
  - FINAL EXAM (essay exam online)