

**Contemporary Religion and Public Life\* (RS-659)  
Fall 2019**

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Office hours: Mondays and Tuesdays from 12:00 pm to 2:30 pm

**Class Location and Time**

Mondays from 7:00 pm to 9:45 pm

Location: TBD

**Description**

This course looks behind the headlines that speak of the religious resurgence in contemporary politics and examine the thorny issues that arise when the boundaries between the “church” and “state” inevitably collide. What is “religion” and what is its place in late modern societies? What is unique and problematic about religious participants in public life? And what do perceptions of religion tell us about the constantly shifting “rules of the game” in contemporary democratic societies? These questions will be at the core of our examination of theoretical engagements with the concepts of religion, secularism, modernity, tradition, democracy and human rights. Our case studies will be from American and global contexts.

**Learning Outcomes:**

- To demonstrate the knowledge, capacities, and willingness to respectfully engage other religions and world views (MARS #2)
- To demonstrate knowledge and skills for dialogical and constructive engagement with diversity (MARS #4)
- To demonstrate the ability to relate theory and practice in the social contexts in which a religion’s communities exist (MARS #5)
- Develop an appreciation of living in a pluralistic world and dialogical skills needed to work in multi-faith and diverse settings (ICP #2)
- To demonstrate knowledge of the larger social and cultural dynamics affecting religious life and organizations in the 21st century and their implications for ministry setting (DMin #1)
- To share the transformed consciousness of one’s own spirituality in ways beneficial to the wider world (MATLS #3)
- To acquire a comprehensive knowledge in Islamic Studies, Christian-Muslim Relations, and Interreligious Engagement/Interfaith Dialogue (PhD #1)
- To develop the competence to produce original research and written works to advance the scholarship on Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations for the benefit of religious communities, academy, and society (PhD #2)

## Evaluation

Grading will be based on

1. Weekly reflections/"talking points" (30%)
2. Mid-term essay (20%) – **due on November 11**
3. Class presentations (10%)
4. Final essay (30%) – **due on December 23**
5. Class participation (10%).

## Logistics

### 1) Weekly Reflections:

You will be expected to analyze and discuss the assigned readings at each session. Weekly reflections will be your "talking points." They will help you organize your thoughts and prepare for each class.

**Starting with the second week, please post your weekly reflections in CANVAS by 5:00 pm on the day of class.**

Each reflection must be around 2 pages (a bit less or a bit more does not matter). Please approach each reflection as a dialogue between you and the readings. In other words, what are your thoughts on one or two points an author makes? What are some questions that have arisen while you read the assignment?

It is up to you to shape each reflection. Some possible ways may be to

- Reflect on an idea you found intriguing
- Explore how an author presents a particular theme
- Think through implications of a particular idea (don't make it too broad)
- Compare between this and previous weeks' readings.
- Trace how this week's reading speaks to a theme we have encountered earlier.

This is important: End each reflection with 2 or 3 questions you would like to ask in class.

You will be required to start submitting reflections as of our 2<sup>nd</sup> session. The grade for this assignment will be based on the quantity and quality of your submissions. I will return printed copies of your reflection with a grade of either a "+" or a "-." Plus stands for pass, and minus for fail.

The scale for the final evaluation will be as follows:

- A=11 passing entries
- B=8 passing entries

C+ = 6 passing entries  
C=5 passing entries  
F=4 or fewer passing entries.

No late submissions will be accepted. There will be no way to make up for missed reflections.

Note that each student will be asked to formally present their reflection and serve as a respondent to another student's reflection once during the semester.

## 2) Midterm and Final Essays:

You will have to submit two essays during the semester. The midterm essay should be 5-7 pages in length (10-12 for PhD and DMin students). The final essay should be 10-12 pages (15-17 for PhD and DMin students).

I will assign the topic for the midterm paper. However, you will be responsible for selecting the subject of your final essay.

Please feel free to contact me with your ideas for both papers at any stage of preparation.

Grading standards for the essays will be:

A = Excellent. Excellent presentation and analysis that demonstrates original interpretation.  
B = Good. Solid command of facts and good attempt at analysis.  
C+ = Adequate in the sense of doing minimal compliance with the assignment.  
C = Poor; did not complete the assignment adequately but shows some effort.  
F = Failing; did not complete the assignment.

## 3) Class Presentation:

At the end of semester, we will hold three sessions where each student will present and defend their proposal for the final essay. In the week when you present your proposal, you will not be required to submit a reflection. Instead, you will e-mail me your proposal, which must include: a) preliminary title; b) thesis statement (1 paragraph); c) brief outline of your analysis; d) bibliography.

### **Required Texts**

- 1) Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Duke University Press, 2004)
- 2) Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2000)
- 3) Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (Columbia University Press, 2006)

- 4) Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford University Press, 2003)
- 5) William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Duke University Press, 2005)

Additional material will be assigned and posted on SONISWEB throughout the course.

### **Schedule**

- 1) September 9:
  - Talal Asad. "Religion as an Anthropological Category" in Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1993. pp. 27-54 (posted in CANVAS)
- 2) September 16:
  - Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, pp. 1-100
- 3) September 23:
  - Taylor – the rest of the book, pp. 101-197
- 4) September 30: Rosh Hashanah observed – SEMINARY CLOSED
- 5) October 7:
  - Bakhtin, Mikhail. "The Problem of Speech Genres" and "Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences" in *Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences. Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986 (posted in CANVAS)
  - Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 3-82
- 6) October 14:
  - Harding – the rest of the book, pp. 83-282.

7) October 21:

- Jürgen Habermas. “Religion in the Public Sphere” European Journal of Philosophy 14:1 (2006) pp. 1–25 (posted in CANVAS)
- Jose Casanova. “Private and Public Religions” Social Research. Vol. 59, no. 1 (Spring 1992) (posted in CANVAS)
- John T. McGreevy, Chapters 6 and 7, from *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History*, pp. 166-215. (posted in CANVAS)

8) October 28:

- Jose Casanova, “Civil Society and Religion: Retrospective Reflections on Catholicism and Prospective Reflections on Islam.” (posted in CANVAS)
- Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy.” (posted in CANVAS)
- Chapter 4, “Politics,” from Timur R. Yuskaev, *Speaking Qur’an* (posted in CANVAS)
- Additional assignment (not required, but highly recommended): View two online videos by Hamza Yusuf
  - a) “Making Sense of Our Past” (There are many places one can find it. One of them is on <http://www.aswatalislam.net/FilesList.aspx?T=Video&C=Lectures&T1=Hamza%20Yusuf>)
  - b) “Give and Take for God’s Sake” (you can find this one easily on YouTube and elsewhere)

9) November 4: Midterm and discussion (no reflections are due on this day)

**Midterms papers are due on this day.** Please email them to [yuskaev@hartsem.edu](mailto:yuskaev@hartsem.edu) by 5:00 pm on 11/4.

Assignment:

1) Select one among three texts to analyze:

Option 1: Franky Schaeffer’s sermon from Harding, pp. 132-139.

Option 2: Chapter “Yasmin” from Moustafa Bayoumi’s *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?*, pp. 81-114 (posted in CANVAS)

Option 3: a primary text of your own choice. I prefer for such a text to be from the materials we have read – or heard, as in Hamza Yusuf’s sermons – in class. If not, please attach a copy of the text you’re analyzing as an addendum to your paper. If it is an audio or video recording, provide a link to where it is posted online, or email me a copy of the audio file. If someone wants a suggestion for a primary text, one may look, for example, at John Courtney Murray’s *We Hold These Truths* (available at [http://www.library.georgetown.edu/woodstock/Murray/whtt\\_index](http://www.library.georgetown.edu/woodstock/Murray/whtt_index).) One does not need to read the whole text to select a passage to analyze.

2) Write a 5-7 page paper (10-12 pages for PhD and DMin students) analyzing the politics in the text you selected (keep in mind Harding’s definition of politics). In your analysis, make sure to utilize the theoretical and other material we have read in the class up to this point.

Email your papers to [yuskaev@hartsem.edu](mailto:yuskaev@hartsem.edu) by 5:00 pm on November 4.

Be ready to discuss your paper in class.

10) November 11:

- Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 1-126.

11) November 18:

- Asad – the rest of the book, pp. 127-256.
- Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 1-66.

***November 25: Reading day/no classes***

12) December 2:

- Hirschkind – the rest of the book, pp. 67-214.

13) December 9:

- William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Duke University Press, 2005)

14) December 16: concluding discussion and final paper presentations

No reflections are due on this day. Instead, each student is required to submit a proposal for their final paper. The proposal should be 1 to 2 pages long (can be single space), and include:

- 1) preliminary title
- 2) statement about the material analyzed in the paper
- 3) central analytical question
- 4) indication of some theoretical and other material (from what we have read in the class) that will be used in the paper
- 5) rudimentary outline
- 6) preliminary thesis statement (a hypothesis; an articulation of the key hunch; or, in other words, a draft of the answer to the central analytical question)

**Final paper due: December 23**

Email the paper to [yuskaev@hartsem.edu](mailto:yuskaev@hartsem.edu)