

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT



**REL 101-6-23**

**Mark McClish**

**TTH 11:00-12:20pm**

**remote/synchronous**

## Religion and the Land Ethic

In 1949, conservationist Aldo Leopold published an essay entitled, “The Land Ethic.” He argued that humans are in community with, and have moral obligations to, soil, water, plants and animals. His call for the development of “ecological consciousness” has since been taken up, expanded, and critiqued by environmentalists. More recently, indigenous peoples have fought for recognition that such ethics have long guided their communities, before and during European colonization and settlement. Around the world, indigenous communities have taken the lead in demanding changes to the ways in which modern societies relate to the land. This course explores the idea of a land ethic, what it must consider and how it might come to be successfully embedded within culture and consciousness. In particular, we will look at how the various cultural formations and personal experiences that are often named “religion” and “spirituality” can reflect and promote various land ethics, particularly inasmuch as the prerogatives of “religion” might provide a context for experiencing and valuing land outside and/or alongside its aesthetic, economic and political value.

Spring 2021

Spring 2021

Spring 2021



# RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT



## INTRO TO CHRISTIANITY

Whose Christianity matters? More often than not, an introduction to Christianity is an introduction to big words and great men. That's all very well, but most Christians throughout history have gone nameless; most rituals have no author, and a lot of the best loved texts and traditions are hard to fix on any individual. What does a Christianity look like when viewed not from the view of traditional history, but from the ground up? This course introduces the history, culture, and practices of Christianity from antiquity to the present by means of anonymous texts, texts without a confirmed author.

**REL 240-20**

**Matthew Chalmers**

**MW 11:00-12:20pm**

**remote/synchronous**

Spring 2021

Spring 2021

Spring 2021



# RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT

## American Religious History II

REL 265-20

/ HIS 200-22

Stephanie Brehm

TTH 9:30-10:50am

remote/synchronous

Explore the role of religious ideas and practices in shaping American life between 1945 and 2020, specifically instances of public religious expression, religious motivations for political decisions, and the complexity of religious tolerance as a foundation in American life. Topics include Cold War religious identities; the Civil Rights Movement; Vatican II Catholicism; religious immigration, women and gender in religious thought and practice; evangelical Christianity in politics and media; Islamophobia; interfaith initiatives; and contemporary religious demographics. Counts towards Religion, Law and Politics (RLP) religious studies major concentration.

Spring 2021    Spring 2021    Spring 2021



# RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT



## *Intro to Theology*

**REL 270-20**

**Christine Helmer**

**MWF 10:00-10:50am**

**remote/synchronous**

Theology is an academic discipline that, like philosophy, has to do with the big questions of life: What does God have to do with the world? How does body relate to soul? Why is evil so pernicious? What is special about theological thinking? We address the question “what is theology?” by asking theologians how they think, what topics fascinate them, and how they bring their experiences to their work. We discuss Christian theologians from the past, who have impressed their ideas on both the development of theology and culture in the west. We look to contemporary theologians to explain why some forms of theology perpetuate exclusions and how theology can be a tool for thinking about inclusive practices in church and world.

Spring 2021

Spring 2021

Spring 2021



# RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT

## BUDDHIST CULTURES AND RHETORIC OF VIOLENCE

REL 318-22 /  
ASIAN\_LG 290-20  
Antonio Terrone  
TTH 11:00-12:20pm  
remote/synchronous

Even a cursory reading of world history reminds us of the pervasive power religion possesses to incite violence, yet instances of violence incited in the name of Buddhism still tends to elicit surprise, given its associations with tranquility and nonviolence. In this course students will investigate the intersections between Buddhism and violence, with an eye toward considering their imbrication in specific cultural and historical contexts in Asia, including Myanmar, Sri Lanka, China, Tibet, Japan, and Thailand. In the first part of the course students will examine basic concepts and definitions of relevant categories including “religion,” “violence,” “sacrifice,” “ritual,” “martyrdom,” “nationalism,” and “terrorism.” The second part will focus on specific case studies in which Buddhism has played a significant role in inciting political violence, terrorism, and self-immolation in Asia. Some of the provocative questions that this course asks include: Do Buddhist texts condone violence in particular circumstances? Is there a Buddhist version of just war theory? How and why have Buddhist institutions aligned with state sanctioned forms of violence in certain contexts and resisted them in others? In what ways is there precedent in Buddhist cultural and textual history for self-immolation, and does this qualify as violence? There are no pre-requisites for this course aside from a curiosity to explore the relationship between religion and violence in Asia beyond the stereotype of Buddhism as the spiritual tradition of peace calm.

Spring 2021    **Spring 2021**    Spring 2021

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT



**REL 349-23**

**Matthew Chalmers**

**MW 2:00-3:20pm**

**remote/synchronous**

## ANCIENT BOOKS AND THEIR POWER

This course dives headfirst into ancient and modern views on the power of religious books. Books, sacred and otherwise, could communicate, symbolize, and inspire – but they could also threaten, destabilize, and teach sorcery or violence. As well as their meanings for the past, we explore the discovery of ancient books in the present, the technologies by which they become readable, and their consequences for understanding ancient religion. Throughout, we'll encounter and ask questions of our modern fantasies and fears about books; censorship, book-burning, secrecy, suppression, and the social power of the written word.

Spring 2021

**Spring 2021**

Spring 2021



# RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT



**REL 371-20 /**

**RTVF 398-20**

**Michelle Molina**

**T 2-3:50pm**

**remote/synchronous**

## RELIGION & EXISTENTIALISM IN FILM

In the aftermath of the World War I, many artists and filmmakers asked new questions about the relationship between realism and religion. Could one reconcile concrete reality (or realism) with faith in the other-worldly? Many of the artists under discussion in the course drew upon themes that had already been raised by Kierkegaard in the 19th century. What was the relationship between religion and modernity, faith and ethics, reality and the supernatural, observable phenomena and invisible causes? How did one make sense of death in a meaningless universe? Was the universe meaningless? Could meaning be found in realism itself? Through engagement with films by directors ranging from Robert Bresson, Luis Buñuel, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Ingmar Bergman, to Woody Allen and Harold Ramis, we will study mid-to-late 20th century films whose common theme is the quest to understand the meaning of life, either actively through taking up religious life, or because the protagonists consider themselves inhabiting a godless and meaningless universe. Class will be discussion-based, with a few short lectures to set up pertinent themes. Our discussions will likely range broadly, but important themes will be realism, existentialism, atheism, and the quest for philosophical truth to be found in filmic portrayals of everyday life. Class readings will include Kierkegaard, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, among others. \*By Instructor Permission Only.

Spring 2021

Spring 2021

Spring 2021

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT



REL 379-20

/ POLI\_SCI 382-20

Elizabeth Shakman Hurd

TTH 12:30-1:50pm

remote/synchronous

## POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

This course explores strategies to think religion anew in the contemporary world. It examines dominant narratives about how religion relates to law, politics, and public culture in the US, US foreign policy, and in other countries. We begin with legal controversies over yoga, the public display of crèches in the United States, and the religious history of the American project. We then turn to the question of who is a Jew legally in the United Kingdom before moving further afield to reflect on a series of dilemmas involving the intersections of law, religion, and politics around the world. We conclude by returning to the U.S. to consider the place of Islam and Muslims in the U.S. today. The course crosses disciplinary, geographic, and secular-religious boundaries, drawing on readings from politics, legal studies, religious studies, indigenous studies, anthropology, history, and popular culture. Students will also consider their own experiences of living with religious diversity in course discussions and assignments. \*Counts towards (RLP) Religion, Law, and Politics religious studies major concentration.

Spring 2021    Spring 2021    Spring 2021



# RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT



## *Religion and Magic*

**REL 379-21**

**Richard Kiekhefer**

**MW 3:30-4:50pm**

**remote/synchronous**

Contrary to what many assume, magic and religion are not binary opposites. Rather, magic often draws upon the belief systems, the rituals, even the structures of authority provided by religion. Frequently it meets disapproval from others in the religious tradition, but not always. If magic in many of its forms is integrally linked to religion, however, we still have to examine how the two are connected, how a particular form of magic relates to a specific religious tradition, how it challenges what people believe, how it can both subvert and be coopted by authority, and how it serves people's perceived needs differently from other religious practices. \*Counts towards Religion, Health and Medicine (RHM) major concentration.

Spring 2021

Spring 2021

Spring 2021



# RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT



## SIN, SALVATION, & RACIALIZATION IN LATIN AMERICA

REL 386-20

/ HIS 300-30

Michelle Molina

TH 2:00-3:50pm

remote/synchronous

The vibrant culture of an Indigenous people, the import of African slaves with their varied traditions, and the domination of a European Christian settler class: these are all factors shared by Latin America and the United States. Despite these common factors, racializing practices and the emergence of “race” are quite different in the two regions. Focusing primarily on Mexico, we see how religion and race are intertwined, beginning with the formative colonial period. To understand the complicated permutations of race in Latin America, we study three realms: Spanish law, the institutional Catholic church, and, the devotional lives of historical actors, from the colonial period through the twentieth century. \*Counts toward Religion, Law and Politics (RLP) Concentration.

Spring 2021

Spring 2021

Spring 2021



# RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT

## STUDIES IN MODERN BUDDHISM

REL 473-22

/ ASIAN\_LG 492-22

Antonio Terrone

T 2-4:50pm

remote/synchronous

This graduate seminar will probe the notion of modernity and modernism in the field of Buddhist studies. Through weekly readings of some of the most recent monographs on the subject, students will consider the meanings and implications of modern Buddhism as it is understood in relation to different contexts including Myanmar, China, Mongolia, Tibet, and the U.S. Questions we will explore include: What are the distinguishing features of modern Buddhism (and Buddhist modernism), and how are recent scholars invoking these categories? Who are the agents of Buddhist modernity, and how do they relate to forms of secularism, colonialism, and nationalism? What socio-political and intellectual forces are mobilizing innovation and rationalization of Buddhism on a global scale? Is modernism about homogenization? Is dis-indigenization and the re-emphasis on canonical scriptures aimed at appealing to Euro-American societies? Is mindfulness the new yoga? These questions and more that are tailored to the research interests of students in the course will fuel our classroom conversations.

Spring 2021    **Spring 2021**    Spring 2021



# RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT



## *Religion and Narrative*

**REL 482-20**

**Barry Wimpfheimer**

**MW 12:30-1:50pm**

**remote/synchronous**

Narratives are centrally important to religions. From foundational myths that create the space within which religion happens to discrete episodes that ground specific rituals, narratives are the very stuff of religion. The purpose of this course is to consider narratives as a special site for the production of religious meaning; the course will draw heavily from both religion theory and literary theory. Issues we will cover include: whether textual meaning is located in the author, text or reader; how the religious context of a narrative affects its possible interpretations; how myths and rituals comprise different modes of narrative; the relationship between narrative time and religious time; the challenge to authority inherent to much religious narrative; the variety of ways through which religious figures mobilize narrative to further their authority.

Spring 2021 **Spring 2021** Spring 2021