

# Intro to Religion



REL 170-20  
Michelle Molina

In-Person  
MW  
11:00-12:20 pm

Religion: we think we recognize it when we see it, and yet it is always changing. How does one study a moving target?

In the first weeks of the course, we look back in time to understand how the ideas about religion that are familiar to us today are rooted in history. The emergence of the concept of “religion” as an object of comparison and study grew out of early modern European sectarian violence and colonial overseas expansion.

We then turn to study some thinkers from the 19th and 20th centuries who developed theories about the best ways to study religion. These scholars developed and honed the fields of sociology, anthropology, and psychology by testing their methods on case studies about religion. To know this history is to know our present, as well as to understand the methodologies that shape the university curriculum.

What do we do with this legacy? Are these methods adequate to understanding religion today? In the second half of this class, we critically evaluate these methods by putting them to work to analyze religion in the world, both past and present. We will focus on how religion moves people. People are rooted in space and place by their religious practices, while simultaneously being moved by religion. As will have become clear in the first half of the course, religion is a moving target because people themselves do not stay the same. Throughout the course, we track the tension between rootedness and mobility by examining three themes: “conversion,” “borderlands,” and “death/afterlives.”

\*Reserved for first-years, sophomores, and religious studies majors and minors.



# Intro to Buddhism



**REL 210-20**  
**Kevin Buckelew**

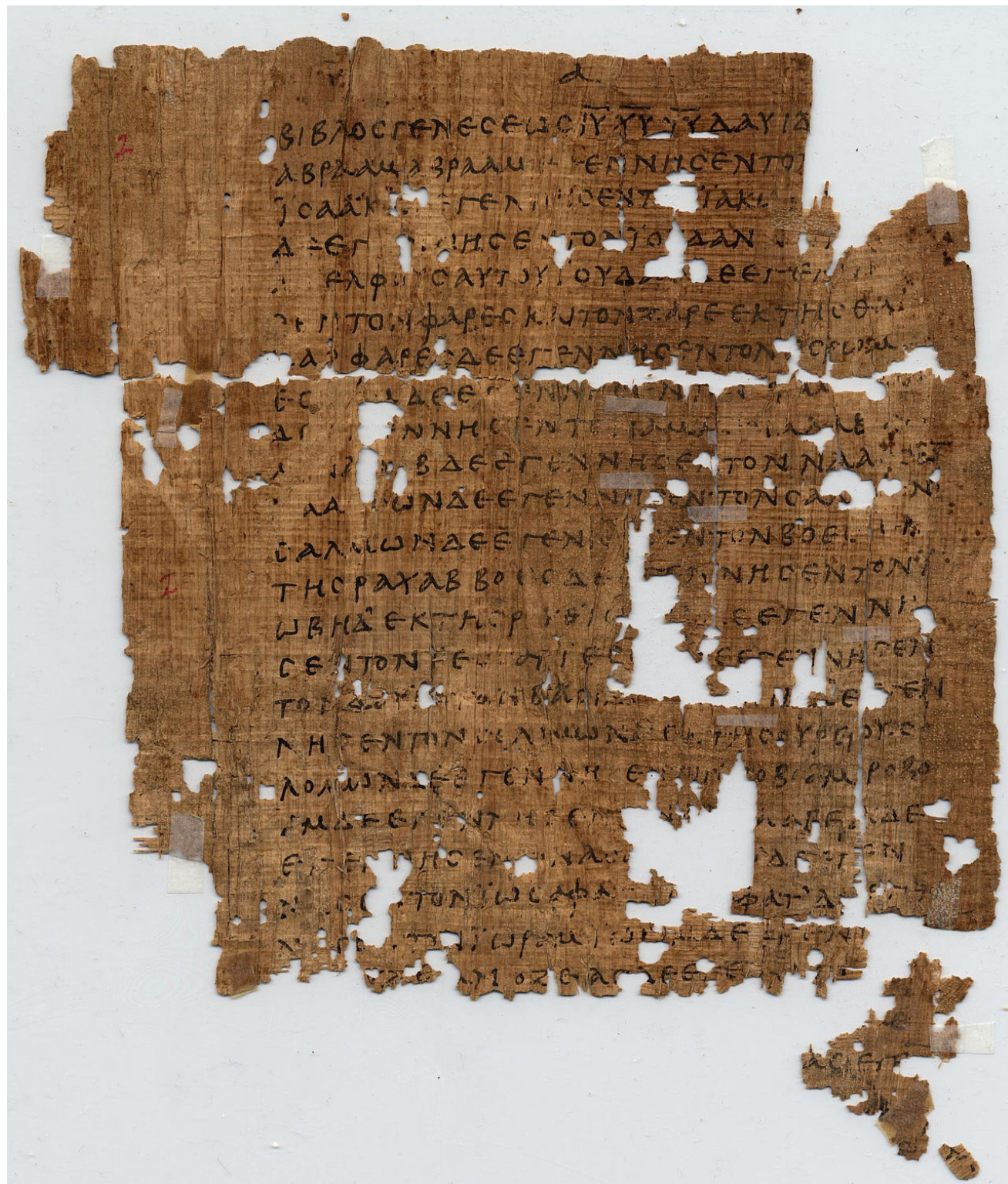
**Remote/  
Asynchronous**

This course offers an introduction to Buddhist history, culture, philosophy, and practice. We explore the major doctrinal varieties of Buddhism, from its inception through the rise of the Mahayana and Tantric or Vajrayana traditions. At the same time, we also investigate Buddhist visual, material, and ritual cultures—which offer windows onto aspects of Buddhism as a lived religion not always visible in scriptural sources. In the process we engage themes like the meaning of suffering, the cosmology of cyclical rebirth, the social role of monasticism and its intervention in traditional family structures, the place of women and gender in Buddhism, the relationship between religious ideals and everyday life, the question of self-reliance versus divine assistance, and the power of images and icons.



# Intro to the New Testament

REL 221-22 | Matthew Chalmers



Remote/  
Synchronous

Monday/  
Wednesday  
9:30-10:50 am

The New Testament is one of the most significant collections of texts to have ever existed. It forms one of the foundation stones for the identity of Christianity as a global religion, as well as providing a powerful cultural reservoir even for contemporary secular American society. It did not, however, burst into the world fully formed, but emerged as an authoritative collection only over several centuries. This course introduces you to the texts of the New Testament, the context in which those texts emerged, and the processes by which the collection became authoritative ("canonization").



# Intro to Judaism

**REL 230-22**  
**Clare Sufrin**

**Remote/  
Synchronous**

**TTh**  
**9:30-10:50 am**



This course will examine core aspects of Judaism and their development from the religion's biblical beginnings through today. Against the background of Jewish and world history, we will seek to understand the roots and evolution of Jewish rituals, literature, traditions, and beliefs in different places around the world. Judaism and Jewishness have changed so much over the centuries that sometimes this might seem like a course in comparative religion. Our challenge will be to understand why these changes occurred while also identifying the continuities that connect Jews across time and space.



# Religion and the Body in China

REL 316-21/  
ASIAN\_LG 300-21

Remote/Synchronous  
TTH 11:00-12:20 pm

Kevin Buckelew



This seminar explores the place of the body in Chinese religion, from the ancient period to the present day. In the course of this exploration, we seek to challenge our presuppositions about a seemingly simple question: what is “the body,” and how do we know? We open by considering themes of dying and the afterlife, food and drink, health and medicine, gender and family. We then turn to Daoist traditions of visual culture. We read ghost stories and analyze the complex history of footbinding. Finally, we conclude with two case studies of religion and the body in contemporary China, one situated on the southwestern periphery, the other in the capital city of Beijing. Throughout the quarter, we investigate how the body has mediated relationships between Buddhist, Daoist, and popular religious traditions. Counts toward RHM, RSC.



# Religion and Politics in the People's Republic of China

Remote/Synchronous

TTh 2:00-3:20 pm

REL 318-23/

ASIAN\_LG 300-23

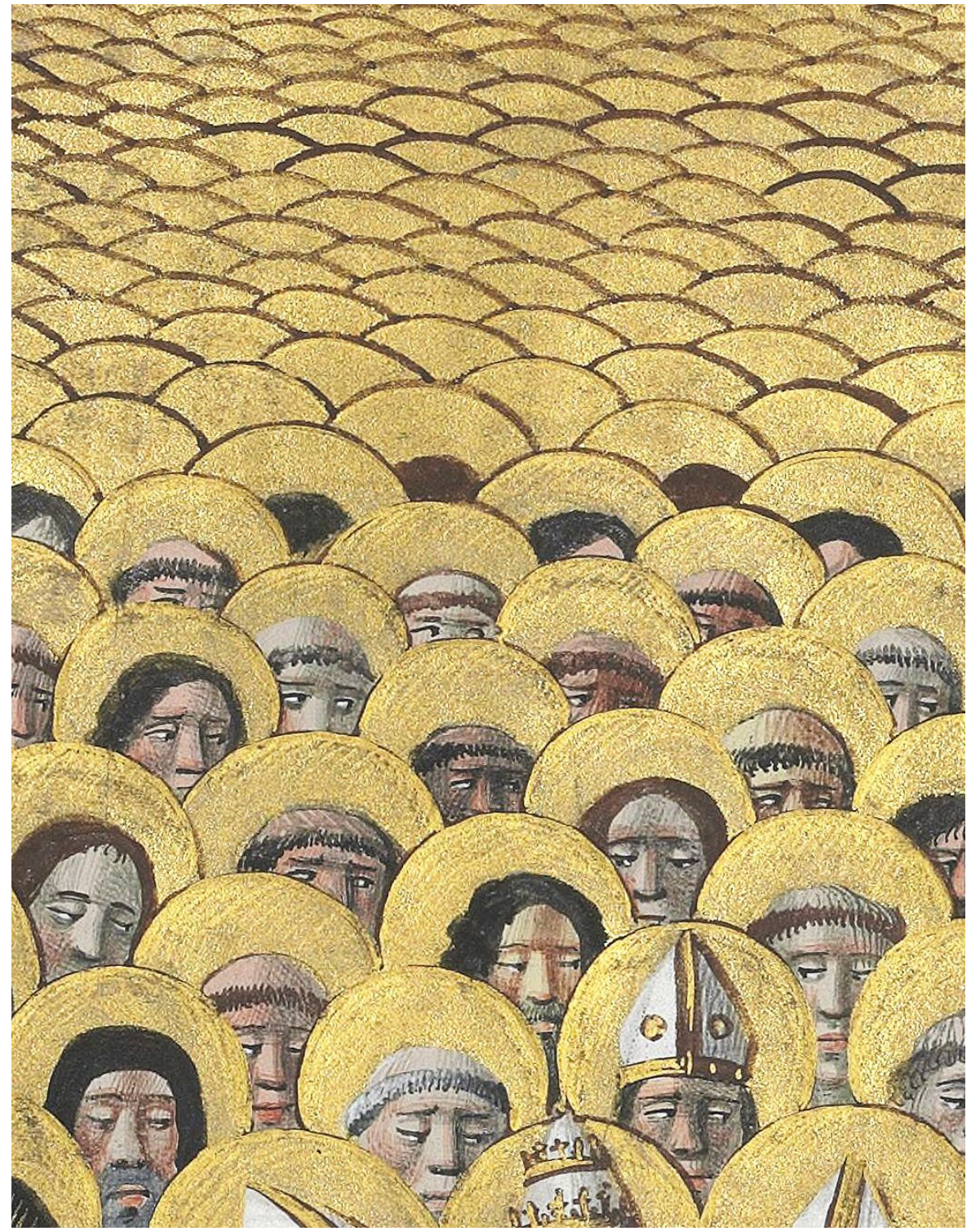
Antonio Terrone

This course will examine the role of religion in post-1980's China and the political implications of the practice of religion in the People's Republic of China. To place this field in context, students will read various forms of literature and policy documents to assess the extent to which Marxist theory is central to the interpretation of religion in Communist China. Primary sources will include Chinese constitutional articles, white papers, and editorials in English translation. Secondary sources will cover a wide range of interpretations and perspectives on the position of religious institutions and religious practices in the PRC. Topics that this course will investigate include the expression of religiosity under Communism in China; the rehabilitation of Confucian values; the constitutional protection of religion and religious belief in China; the relationship between ethnicity and religious policies; the Sinicization of religion; and the administration of the five officially accepted religious traditions in the People's Republic of China (Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Daoism, and Islam).

The second part of the course will be dedicated to a detailed exploration of the recent cases related to the Muslim Uyghurs of Xinjiang and the Tibetan Buddhists of Western China. The class will explore some of the most controversial issues related to these two ethnic minorities including terrorism, religious violence, nationalism, assimilation, foreign influence, and soft power. \*Counts towards RLP.



# The Idea of Sainthood in Christianity



REL 345-20

Richard Kieckhefer

Remote/Synchronous

MW 2-3:20 PM

The phenomenon of sainthood opens a range of issues. A living saint is an exemplar of heroic virtue, and ideas of sainthood reflect the ethical norms of a particular Christian society. A deceased saint is the focus of veneration, and the ways people behave toward saints (going on pilgrimage to venerate their relics, showing reverence to their images, praying for intercession in the hope of miraculous healing, etc.) tells a great deal about official and unofficial Christian piety. A saint is often a kind of folk hero around whom legends develop. A saint may be a patron or figurehead for some interest group such as a religious order or a city. In churches that have a process of canonization, the making of saints becomes a mirror of ecclesiastical politics. The course will survey the development of sainthood throughout the history of Christianity, from the second century to the present.



# How Thin is a Demon?

## Bodies and Ancient Christianity

REL 349-22

Matthew Chalmers

Remote/Synchronous  
MW 12:30-1:50 pm



Bodies matter. Perhaps now more than ever before, it is becoming widely obvious to us that it really matters what type of body you are and what sorts of assumptions people make about you. The origins of Christianity have a lot to do with bodies as well. After all, the story of Jesus is the story of a suffering, dying, and rising Jewish body. Narratives about the earliest Christians are shot through with violence, blood, love, and power. They are also a history of gender, sex, ethnicity, bodily discipline, and embodied excess. But people are not the only bodies in antiquity. The ancient Mediterranean and its heavens seethed with angels, demons, animals, and monsters. This course critically examines embodiment in the early Christian world, both human and non-human. \*Counts towards RHM major concentration.





**Remote/Synchronous**  
**MWF 10:00-10:50 am**

# Science Fiction and Social Justice

**REL 379-23**  
**Ashley King**

This course will examine major utopian and dystopian texts and films in relation to social justice issues in the twentieth century and beyond, while following the stories of artists, organizers, and communities that have used speculative world-building to imagine livable, sustainable futures. We will focus on how feminist, anarchist, LGBTQ, and Afrofuturist art and activism have contributed to a substantial critical discourse on the intersections of science, technology, ecology, war, race, gender, sexuality, health, and ability. This course will further examine how artists and activists have understood religion as both impediment and partner to social justice work, while alternatively embracing, subverting, and defying religious authority. We will attend to how religious myths and imagery are sampled and remixed by science fiction authors to plot an alternative course for history. \*Counts towards RLP and RSG major concentrations.



# Embodiment/Materiality /Affect

REL 471-20/GNDR\_ST 490-20/HIS 492-20

Thursday

Michelle Molina

3:00-5:50 PM

Hybrid/Synchronous

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This seminar explores theoretical approaches to the problem of body/embodiment/materiality. One aim of the course is to examine various methodological approaches to embodiment and materiality, making use of sociology and philosophy (Pierre Bourdieu, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Baruch Spinoza, and Bruno Latour). The second and closely related aim is to situate bodies in time and place, that is, in history. Here we look to the particular circumstances that shaped the manner in which historical actors experienced their bodies in the Christian west (Peter Brown, Mary Carruthers, Michel Foucault, among others). Ultimately, we will be examining theoretical tools while we put them to work. The goal: how to use these theorists to write more dynamic, creative, interesting scholarship?

\*The Instructor will be teaching alone in a classroom, the students can participate via Zoom. Class presenters will have the option to come in to the classroom to present in person or present from home on Zoom.



# Religion, Race & Global Politics



Remote/  
Synchronous  
Fridays  
9:00-11:50 am

REL 471-21/  
POLI\_SCI 490-24  
Elizabeth Hurd

This seminar is an experiment in studying the intersections of religion, race, and global politics. We discuss how particular understandings of religion and race inform scholarship, shape national and international legal and governmental practice, and contribute to the establishment and maintenance of various social hierarchies and inequalities. Cross-cutting themes include religion and the rise of the nation-state; the politics of religious establishment, law, and freedom; race and the formation of the disciplines of religious studies, international relations and the social sciences more broadly; the formation of modern vocabularies of religious and racial exclusion; and race, indigeneity, and slavery in U.S. American history. Readings are drawn from international politics, religious studies, political theory, law, anthropology, and history.



An abstract painting featuring a bull's head and body in warm, vibrant colors like red, orange, and yellow. The style is expressive and somewhat cubist, with bold brushstrokes and a sense of movement. The bull is the central focus, looking towards the viewer.

Winter 2021

GER 408  
REL 468

## Critical Theory and Religion

Taught in English

This course explores the central place the concept of “religion” has occupied in the development of critical theory and, in turn, the role critical theory has played in reframing “religion” in modernity and in the contemporary geopolitical moment. German thinkers in the 19th and early 20th centuries took up a critical notion of religion as implicated in the conditions of oppression but then made productive use of this concept as allies in the critique of these conditions. Particularly after Marx, it became possible to speak of religion-after-religion: religion as transcendence; as the call for justice that reconfigures ordinary space and time so that past, present, and future become porous to each other; as the recognition of alterity and the subaltern; and as the grounds for liberated being, beyond the human. We also take up the question, “Is critique secular,” as we consider the contributions, potential and actual, of “religion” to social transformation. Readings by Schleiermacher, Nietzsche, Marx, Sharpe, Felski, and Tsing.

Professor  
Christine  
Helmer

M  
2-4:50pm  
online/synchronous

### Course materials:

• ISBN 9780521479752 • ISBN 978-0822362944 • ISBN 978 0190097646 • ISBN 978-0691162751  
• ISBN 978-0199537082 • ISBN 978-0674047891 • ISBN 978-1509525676 • ISBN 978-0226294032