

**RELI1731; Fall Term  
The College of the Humanities**

**VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE**

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**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

In spite of claims that we live in a secular and post-religious world, religion and religious questions continue to be at the heart of many major social, academic, and political debates, as well as being prominently featured in a wide range of creative works. This course will explore the on-going historical, cultural, and social relevance of religion in the contemporary context and examine the various ways in which human beings contemplate, theorize, communicate, and represent their experience of the “religious”, “spiritual”, “sacred”, or “holy”. The core themes will be explored from a comparative angle, using examples taken from a range of different traditions and perspectives.

- Students will develop a conceptual vocabulary for thinking about and discussing religion from an academic perspective
- Students will engage with a diversity of viewpoints regarding religion and religious culture
- Students will learn to think *reflexively* about religion in order to become more critically self-aware
- Students will learn to engage with and analyze religious themes in creative works of various types

**PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH**

As a first-year course, RELI1731 is often the first time students have been invited to think critically about “religion” or examine it from an academic perspective. This can sometimes be a difficult and disorientating experience, as many people have strong feelings and opinions about the issues involved. Please note that the course is being taught from a non-confessional, non-theological point of view that seeks neither to validate or invalidate religious claims or traditions. Rather, it is meant as a broad introduction to the academic study of religion. Students are invited to think deeply about the issues and concepts presented from a variety of perspectives in order to gain a broader and more self-reflective understanding of religion.

**COURSE DELIVERY**

This course will be delivered in-person. Virtual or remote access is not permitted.

**COMMUNICATION**

The best way to reach me is via email. I do my best to respond to messages within 24 hours during weekdays, 48 hours during weekends. I sometimes miss them, so feel free to follow up or remind me. I will also be holding regular walk-in office hours (TBD) and will also be available by appointment outside of that time.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

**Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Comparing Religions* (Wiley Blackwell, 2014)**

**EVALUATION:**

Initial Reflection	5% (see Written Assignment A below)	<b>DUE Sept 20</b>
Response Paper I	25% (see Written Assignment B below)	<b>DUE Oct 20</b>
Response Paper II	25% (see Written Assignment B below)	<b>DUE Dec 6</b>
Midterm Exam	20% (first half of course material)	<b>Oct 22-29</b>
Final Exam	25% (scheduled / in-person / all course material)	TBD

**PLEASE NOTE: USE OF AI TEXT GENERATION APPLICATIONS (SUCH AS CHATGPT, ETC.) IS NOT PERMITTED FOR ANY COURSE COMPONENTS.**

DATE	TOPICS	READINGS*
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**\*Additional readings on Brightspace**

Sept 6	Course Introduction	
Sept 11	COMPARATIVE PRACTICES	KRIPAL CHAPTER 1
Sept 13	Reading / Reflection: In Search of Meaning(s)	BORGES <i>The Library</i>
Sept 18	FROM THE BIBLE TO BUDDHISM	KRIPAL CHAPTER 2
Sept 20	Reading / Reflection: Ways of Liberation	AKUTAGAWA, <i>The Spider Thread</i>
Sept 25	THE SKILL OF REFLEXIVITY	KRIPAL CHAPTER 3
Sept 27	Reading / Reflection: Limits of Language	BUBER <i>I and Thou</i>
Oct 2	MYTH AND RITUAL	KRIPAL CHAPTER 4
Oct 4	Reading / Reflection: Religion and Violence	EURIPIDES <i>Bacchae</i>
Oct 11	RELIGION, NATURE, SCIENCE	KRIPAL CHAPTER 5
Oct 16	SEX AND BODY	KRIPAL CHAPTER 6
Oct 18	Reading / Reflection: Deconstructing Dualisms	BLAKE <i>Marriage of Heaven and Hell</i>
Oct 30	SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF RELIGION	KRIPAL CHAPTER 7
Nov 1	Reading / Reflection: Society and the Sacred	SAKI <i>The Story of St Vespaluus</i>
Nov 6	THE RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION	KRIPAL CHAPTER 8
Nov 8	Reading / Reflection: Dreams and Visions	DOSTOYEVSKY <i>The Dream</i>
Nov 13	THE END OF ALL THINGS	KRIPAL CHAPTER 9
Nov 15	Reading / Reflection: Worlds Beyond	RILKE Sonnets to Orpheus
Nov 20	RELIGION AND MUSIC ( <b>*no in-person class</b> )	The Who's <i>Tommy</i>
Nov 22	RELIGION AND FILM ( <b>*no in-person class</b> )	<i>The Grand Inquisitor</i>
Nov 27	FAITHFUL RE-READINGS	KRIPAL CHAPTER 10
Nov 29	RATIONAL RE-READINGS	KRIPAL CHAPTER 11
Dec 4	REFLEXIVE RE-READINGS	KRIPAL CHAPTER 12
Dec 6	Reflection / Discussion	
Dec 8	Conclusion / Questions	

## WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT A: INITIAL REFLECTION

When it comes to the topic of religion, we all have assumptions, preconceptions, and experiences that inform and shape our understanding. One of the goals of this course is to come to terms with those assumptions and develop a more self-conscious awareness of how we think about and relate to religious ideas, issues, and representations. For this assignment, please compose a 2-page (double spaced) reflection on the following questions:

*Describe something (it could be a person, place, thing, idea, artwork, etc.) to which you might apply the words “sacred” or “holy”? If you have difficulty relating to those terms, then how about “supremely beautiful,” “transcendent” or “sublime”? How do you relate to this? Why is it important to you?*

Submit your paper in .pdf form via Brightspace by due date (see above).

NB: There is no “right” or “wrong” answer here. The purpose of this assignment is simply to provide you with a baseline against which you can evaluate how your understanding may or may not have changed by the end of the term. You will have an opportunity on the final exam to reassess your initial reflection.

## WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT B: RESPONSE PAPERS

For this course you are required to submit **two** response papers on a religiously themed film and book (see lists below). Response Paper I should be based on a film from the list below, while Response Paper II should be based on a text from the list below. Papers will be submitted in .pdf format via Brightspace.

### What a response paper is:

A response paper is a critical / reflective essay that examines how a text or film deals with religious themes and concepts. It is based on a close and careful reading / viewing of the work, contains specific examples drawn from the work, and provides your well-considered opinion of the work’s strengths and/or shortcomings. The essay demonstrates that you have read/watched the chosen work, internalized and contextualized its arguments/themes in light of the course material, and can articulate and substantiate your reactions to it.

### What a reader response paper is NOT:

-A descriptive summary of the book/film or of the historical events it describes.

-A research paper. You don’t have to do any additional research beyond viewing the film or reading the book. However, your analysis should include references to the textbook and additional course readings.

-A classic “thesis” paper, in which you state a thesis argument at the front end and use the book/film to support this thesis, reiterating the argument in the conclusion. The response essay should express a coherent analysis of the work in light of what you’ve been learning in the course.

-An opportunity for general opinionating, nor an opportunity to make statements of opinion that are not supported by evidence drawn from the text/film, or relevant to the issues at hand.

-A test of whether you had the “right” interpretation of the book/film. This is a venue for you to express what the book or film means to **you** in light of what you’ve been learning in the course. It should display thoughtful evaluation of the text and express of how it may have contributed (or not contributed) to your understanding of religious issues and concepts involved.

**Ask yourself the following questions** as you prepare to write a reader response paper. These are not meant to be a template for your paper, but they can help you organize your thoughts and decide what you’d like to write about in your response.

-What were the central religious themes of the book or film? Did the author/director, in your opinion, do an effective job of following through on those themes? How does this book/film relate to what interests you about religion? What did you learn from it? If you didn’t learn much, why was that? What questions did this text/film program leave you with? What would you like to learn more about?

**Sample format for a reader response paper of 4 pages (double spaced):**

1. **Introduction/theme:** 1-2 paragraphs that “set the stage” for what will follow.
2. **Background:** 2-3 paragraphs that introduce the book/film/tv program, its religious themes and the context in which it was written/produced. If you are writing on a tv program, this section should mention which episode(s) (no more than two) you are choosing to focus on and why.
3. **Analysis:** use the remainder of the paper to examine the religious aspects of the book/film and provide your opinion of them. The analysis should contain examples from the work to support your argument (cited with page numbers or time code). You should also make specific connections to concepts from the textbook and course material in order to support your analysis, with appropriate citations.
4. **Conclusion:** one paragraph that states the wider significance of this work to you.

**\*Title page or bibliography is not required.**

**\*\*The paper can be longer than 4 pages, but not shorter.**

**\*\*\*Written assignments submitted late will receive a 10% deduction per day, unless an extension has been granted prior to the due date. Retroactive extensions will not be granted for any reason.**

**CHOOSING A FILM AND BOOK**

For **Paper I** choose a film from the following list and for **Paper II** choose a text. Try to pick something that you haven't seen or read before. You are responsible for acquiring a copy of your selected text/film. No substitutions will be accepted. Please note that the works listed have been selected because they are well suited for analysis and reflection based upon course material. Their inclusion in the list should not be taken as an endorsement of their contents or their artistic merit.

<b>RESPONSE PAPER I: FILM</b>	<b>RESPONSE PAPER II: TEXT</b>
The Seventh Seal (1957)	Hermann Hesse, <i>Siddhartha</i>
Ghandi (1982)	Margaret Atwood, <i>A Handmaid's Tale</i>
The Name of the Rose (1986)	Umberto Eco, <i>The Name of the Rose</i>
Jésus de Montréal (1987)	Carl Jung, <i>Answer to Job</i>
Black Robe (1991)	Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>The Antichrist</i>
Malcolm X (1992)	Frank Herbert, <i>Dune</i>
The Apostle (1997)	Martel, <i>Life of Pi</i>
Kundun (1997)	Philip K. Dick, <i>Valis</i>
The Last Temptation of Christ (1988)	Roger Zelazny, <i>Lord of Light</i>
Princess Mononoke (1997)	C. S. Lewis, <i>Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe</i>
The Messenger (1999)	Barbara Kingsolver, <i>The Poisonwood Bible</i>
Kingdom of Heaven (2005)	Christopher Moore, <i>Lamb</i>
Persepolis (2007)	Khaled Hosseini, <i>The Kite Runner</i>
Vision (2009)	Nikos Kazantzakis, <i>Last Temptation of Christ</i>
Des hommes et des dieux (2010)	Sue Monk Kidd, <i>The Book of Longings</i>
Soul Surfer (2011)	Walter M. Miller, <i>A Canticle for Leibowitz</i>
The Tree of Life (2011)	Samuel Becket, <i>Waiting for Godot</i>
Machine Gun Preacher (2011)	Shūsaku Endō, <i>Silence</i>
Noah (2014)	Yaa Gyasi, <i>Transcendent Kingdom</i>
Dr Strange (2016)	Amin Malouf, <i>Les jardins de lumière</i>
Silence (2016)	Iain M. Banks, <i>Surface Detail</i>
Blade Runner 2049 (2017)	Leila Aboulela, <i>The Kindness of Enemies</i>

***“Thou shall not make a machine in the likeness of a human mind.”***

As stated above, the use of AI text generation platforms ARE NOT permitted for any course components. One of the primary goals of university education is to help you develop your critical thinking skills and writing abilities. I am only interested in what YOU, as a human being, have to say, not in data mined by some robot or algorithm. As such, I reserve the right to require students to discuss the contents of their assignment in-person with me prior to the determination of a grade.

## **PLAGIARISM**

### **1. Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas, or work of others as one's own, including content generated by AI tools.

Plagiarism includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source. Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to: books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, art works, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, material on the internet, content generated by artificial intelligence (AI) tools, and/or conversations.

### **2. Co-operation or Collaboration Students**

shall not co-operate or collaborate on academic work when the instructor has indicated that the work is to be completed on an individual basis. This includes unauthorized use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools. Failure to follow the instructor's directions in this regard is a violation of the standards of academic integrity. Unless otherwise indicated, students shall not co-operate or collaborate in the completion of a test or examination. Students are responsible for being aware of and demonstrating behaviour that is honest and ethical in their academic work (see [www.carleton.ca/registrar](http://www.carleton.ca/registrar)). Instructors at both the graduate and undergraduate level have the responsibility to provide clear guidelines concerning their specific expectations of academic integrity (e.g. rules of collaboration or citation) on all course outlines, assignment and examination material.

## **OTHER INFORMATION**

### **Statement on Student Mental Health**

As a university student you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone.

If you are having difficulty navigating Carleton's various student supports or are unsure about whether your particular situation qualifies, Professor Jensen would be happy to discuss such matters with you (as he has just completed his *Student Support Certificate*, which required familiarizing himself with the various tools and programs available to Carleton students).

There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. Here is a list that may be helpful:

**Emergency Resources (on and off campus):** <https://carleton.ca/health/emergencies-and-crisis/emergency-numbers/>

### **Carleton Resources:**

- Mental Health and Wellbeing: <https://carleton.ca/wellness/>
- Health & Counselling Services: <https://carleton.ca/health/>
- Paul Menton Centre: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>
- Academic Advising Centre (AAC): <https://carleton.ca/academicadvising/>
- Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS): <https://carleton.ca/csas/>
- Equity & Inclusivity Communities: <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

### **Off Campus Resources:**

- Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: (613) 238-3311 or TEXT: 343-306-5550, <https://www.dcottawa.on.ca/>

- Mental Health Crisis Service: (613) 722-6914, 1-866-996-0991, <http://www.crisisline.ca/>
- Empower Me: 1-844-741-6389, <https://students.carleton.ca/services/empower-me-counselling-services/>
- Good2Talk: 1-866-925-5454, <https://good2talk.ca/>
- The Walk-In Counselling Clinic: <https://walkincounselling.com>

### **Statement on Pandemic Measures**

It is important to remember that COVID is still present in Ottawa. The situation can change at any time and the risks of new variants and outbreaks are very real. There are [a number of actions you can take](#) to lower your risk and the risk you pose to those around you including being vaccinated, wearing a mask, staying home when you're sick, washing your hands and maintaining proper respiratory and cough etiquette.

**Feeling sick?** Remaining vigilant and not attending work or school when sick or with symptoms is critically important. If you feel ill or exhibit COVID-19 symptoms do not come to class or campus. If you feel ill or exhibit symptoms while on campus or in class, please leave campus immediately. In all situations, you should follow Carleton's [symptom reporting protocols](#).

**Masks:** Masks are no longer mandatory in university buildings and facilities. However, we continue to recommend masking when indoors, particularly if physical distancing cannot be maintained. We are aware that personal preferences regarding optional mask use will vary greatly, and we ask that we all show consideration and care for each other during this transition.

**Vaccines:** While proof of vaccination is no longer required to access campus or participate in in-person Carleton activities, it may become necessary for the University to bring back proof of vaccination requirements on short notice if the situation and public health advice changes. Students are strongly encouraged to get a full course of vaccination, including booster doses as soon as they are eligible and submit their booster dose information in [cuScreen](#) as soon as possible. Please note that Carleton cannot guarantee that it will be able to offer virtual or hybrid learning options for those who are unable to attend the campus.

All members of the Carleton community are required to follow requirements and guidelines regarding health and safety which may change from time to time. For the most recent information about Carleton's COVID-19 response and health and safety requirements please see the [University's COVID-19 website](#) and review the [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#). Should you have additional questions after reviewing, please contact [covidinfo@carleton.ca](mailto:covidinfo@carleton.ca).

### **ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION**

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

**Pregnancy obligation:** write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For accommodation regarding a formally-scheduled final exam, you must complete the Pregnancy Accommodation Form ([click here](#)).

**Religious obligation:** write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details [click here](#).

**Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic

medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or [pmc@carleton.ca](mailto:pmc@carleton.ca) for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

### **Survivors of Sexual Violence**

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>

### **Accommodation for Student Activities**

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation will be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>