

# Religion and Media

## RELST 304

In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium--that is, of any extension of ourselves--result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves or by any new technology.

-Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 1964

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### Course Objectives and Goals:

What is the difference between a myth told around a fire among a community of people, a printed myth read in the silence of one's own house, and a viral YouTube video? How are rituals affected and altered by differing media of communication? What is the relation between religious reformations and new media technologies? Such questions and others beg the deeper question: can religion exist outside media? These are some of the questions that will get us going this semester, as we explore the interrelations between religious traditions and media.

In the first instance, we will work to set the record straight: *media* is a plural noun that includes orality and printed texts as much as it does the "news media" and/or the "New Media": Media don't have to be plugged into a wall, and this fact has deep implications for the history of religions. This course will investigate the plurality of media, historicizing them so as to better chart their influence in social and religious change. The first part of the term will stretch way back to a time before printing and writing, to reimagine a primarily "oral culture." The invention of writing, and later printing, will allow us a chance to rethink how religious traditions operate in relation to new media. We will then turn to apply this history to contemporary relations between media and religion, including the presence of religion *in* photography, video games, film, and the Internet; and the use of new media technologies *in* religious worship services. We will also be looking at the ways religion impacts, and is impacted by, the "news media."

### Course Materials:

Students will need to purchase the following books, available in the bookstore:

- Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*
- Timothy K. Beal, *The Rise and Fall of the Bible*
- S. Brent Plate, *Religion and Film: Cinema and the Re-Creation of the World*
- Other texts will be made available online through Blackboard (BB). Please check the syllabus, and Blackboard for assigned readings.

### Course Requirements and Grade Distribution:

**Presence:** (20% of the final grade) This grade includes attendance and participation, but entails a more general sense of bringing both body and mind to the classroom for discussions. There are readings or other assignments for every day of class (listed below) and you are required to have read *before* class, and to be prepared to discuss the readings. "Presence" means not coming to class and asking what you were *supposed* to have read; "presence" means listening to the others in the classroom; "presence" means, to use the title of a great religious film, "being there."

The class is small and therefore relies on informed comments by students on a regular basis. The grade for presence includes attendance (see below). The grade also entails that students have read assigned readings *before* class, and come prepared to discuss the readings. You will be graded on your ability to analyze and synthesize assignments; on the frequency, relevance and insights of your comments; and on your ability to present your ideas coherently to the class. Presence grades will be calculated from: 1) my own notes from class sessions, in which I note who was significantly involved in discussion, and 2) your own self-assessment of your contributions to class discussion.

**Finally:** You are expected to treat this classroom as if you were on an airline flight: That is, all electronic devices must be turned off and safely stowed away for the duration of our flights. Cell phones will not be tolerated in this classroom, and laptops are not allowed, except on particular days. A ringing phone or text messaging during class will result in that student being marked absent for the day.

### **"That Religious Show": (60% of final grade)**

The main bulk of assignments for this course will be in the form of a weekly, half-hour radio show our class will be running in cooperation with WHCL. Each of you will be part of a two-person team that will produce **three shows** over the course of the term.

This will be discussed in detail on the second week of class.

### **Two Questions, Two Comments (2Q2C): (20% of final grade)**

On every Wednesday (except where noted), students will bring in two questions and two comments about the assigned readings/viewings for the week. These will be printed out, and handed to Prof Plate at the beginning of class, and will serve as discussion starters for the day's class, and/or brought to the site visits to help prompt discussion with guides at those locations. The comments need only be a simple paragraph. You should be able to fit the whole assignment on one sheet of paper.

For students who are doing a radio show on a particular week, these will be due on Friday.

### **Blackboard**

I will be making use of Blackboard through the semester to post readings, links to websites, etc. Please be sure to bookmark that site. Also, if I have to send an update to the syllabus or assignments, I will send it to your Hamilton email address. You will therefore need to check that on a regular basis.

### **Statement on Disabilities**

Prof Plate will work with any students with disabilities as need be. Students should contact Prof Plate **in the first two weeks of class** to discuss any specific needs, and should have already spoken with Dean Harrison ([aharriso@hamilton.edu](mailto:aharriso@hamilton.edu)) about this. If in question, feel free to contact Prof Plate.

### **Course Schedule**

{NOTE: readings subject to change. Please check with Prof Plate, read your emails, and/or Blackboard for updates.}

<b><u>Introductions</u></b>
W 22 Jan - Introductions, syllabus, Radio Show Schedule.
F 24 Jan - What do we mean by "religion"? And by "media"? Readings: Plate, et al. "Intersections" (Parts 1&2) (BB) <b>First 2Q2C due.</b>
{Sun} 26 Jan 7-9pm – <b>Required attendance</b> , film, <i>Samsara</i> , KJ 125 w/Q&A
<b><u>Radio Show Workshopping</u></b>
M 27 Jan – Discuss <i>Samsara</i> and the effects of media on perceptions of religious worlds. Listen before class: <i>This American Life</i> show on "Faith" (BB) In class: details of Radio Show assignment and brainstorm on topics. <b>7.15 pm (SCCT Aud) DJ meeting for WHCL. Important!</b>
W 29 Jan – Use of digital recorders, editing software for radio show
F 31 Jan – Planning of radio programs. <b>Second 2Q2C - For this week: bring in ideas about radio shows.</b>
<b><u>Radio and Religion</u></b>
M 3 Feb – Readings: Spencer Miller, "Radio and Religion" (BB); Peter Manseau on Radio (BB)
<b>T 7pm at WHCL studio "That Religious Show" begins!</b>
W 5 Feb – Discussion of radio. <b>Third 2Q2C Due.</b>
F 7 Feb - radio show comments; thoughts for next week; round up convo

<b><u>Orality and Islamic Recitation</u></b>
M 10 Feb- Readings: Ong, 5-15, 31-76, 133-135; In Class: Quran recitations.
<b>T "That Religious Show"</b>
W 12 Feb - Readings: F.E. Peters, "The Poet in Performance" (BB) <b>Fourth 2Q2C Due</b>
F 14 Feb – radio show comments; thoughts for next week; round up convo
<b><u>Literacy, Print, and the Christian Bible</u></b>
M 17 Feb - Readings: Ong, 77 - 133; In class, look at rare books from Hamilton Library collection. Andrew Rippeon will lead us.
<b>T That Religious Show</b>
W 19 Feb – Readings: Elizabeth Eisenstein, from <i>The Printing Revolution in Modern Europe</i> , pp. 145-152 (BB) <b>Fifth 2Q2C Due</b>
F 21 Feb – radio show comments; thoughts for next week; round up convo
M 24 Feb – Readings: Beal, <i>Rise and Fall of the Bible</i> , 1-110 (skim chaps 1-2, read others closely) In class: look at bibles from Hamilton collection.
<b>T That Religious Show</b>
W 26 Feb – Readings: Beal, <i>Rise and Fall of the Bible</i> , 110-196 <b>Sixth 2Q2C Due</b>
F 28 Feb - radio show comments; thoughts for next week; round up convo

<b><u>Image Media, Mediated Images</u></b>
M 3 Mar - <b>Photography:</b> Readings: from Colleen McDannell, <i>Picturing Faith</i> (BB)
<b>T That Religious Show</b>
W 5 Mar - <b>Photography:</b> Tour of Exhibitions at Wellin Museum w/Prof Rob Knight <b>Seventh 2Q2C Due</b>
F 7 Mar - radio show comments; thoughts for next week; round up convo
M 10 Mar - <b>Film:</b> Readings: Plate, <i>Religion and Film</i> , 1-58 In class watch film clips
<b>T That Religious Show</b>
W 12 Mar – <b>Film:</b> Readings: Plate, <i>Religion and Film</i> , 59-91 <b>Eighth 2Q2C Due</b>
F 14 Mar – <b>No Class!</b> 17 – 28 Mar No Class – Spring Break
M 31 Mar - <b>Television:</b> Readings: Myrna Grant "Christ and the Media" (BB); In class, watch tv clips
<b>T That Religious Show</b>
W 2 Apr – <b>Television:</b> Readings: Lynn Clark, "The Funky Side of Religion" (BB) <b>Ninth 2Q2C Due</b>
F 4 Apr - radio show comments; thoughts for next week; round up convo

<b><u>Religion and Media case study: Noah</u></b>
M 7 Apr - Readings: on the <i>Noah</i> controversy (BB)
<b>T That Religious Show</b>
W 9 Apr – NO Class
F 11 Apr – No class <b>Tenth 2Q2C Due by email</b>
<b><u>Religion Online</u></b>
M 14 Apr – Readings: Heidi Campbell, "Religion Online and Off" (BB)
<b>T That Religious Show</b>
W 16 Apr – Readings: Explore three websites: Islamicity.com, Gospel.com, Aish.com (all links from BB)  <b>Extra credit options this week (write 2Q2C in response to):</b> 1. Thursday, 4.15, Wellin Museum, Polly Roberts, "Altar as Museum, Museum as Altar." 2. Friday, 12.00, KJ (classroom TBA) AI and Polly Roberts on Museums and display and cross-cultural concerns
F 18 Apr – Guest lecturers, AI and Polly Roberts on Amadu Bamba and Shridi Sai Baba <b>Eleventh 2Q2C Due</b>
<b><u>New Media: Games</u></b>
M 21 Apr - Readings: Rachel Wagner," from <i>God Wired</i> (BB)
<b>T That Religious Show</b>

W 23 Apr – Readings: Kevin Kelley on "God Games" (BB)
F 25 Apr - radio show comments; thoughts for next week; round up convo <b>Thirteenth 2Q2C Due</b>
<b><u>New Media</u></b>
M 28 Apr –Ray Kurzweil and "Transcendent Man"
<b>T That Religious Show</b>
W 30 Apr – Readings: Robert Geraci, "Apocalyptic AI" (BB)
F 2 May- radio show comments; thoughts for next week; round up convo <b>Twelfth 2Q2C Due</b>
<b><u>Wrap Up Sessions: The Future</u></b>
M 5 May - Where do we go with religion and media? Readings: from Sherry Turkle, <i>Alone Together</i> (BB) Gleick, "Information," Seligson, "Online Mourning" In Class: Sherry Turkle, TED talk.
<b>T That Religious Show</b>
W 7 May - Mark Oppenheimer, "Technology is not Driving us Apart," (BB)
F 9 May – Last Day of Class. Round up. <b>Fourteenth 2Q2C Due</b>