**IST 1010: First Year Interdisciplinary Course**

**Reading American Protestantism: Religious Bestsellers**

**Fall 2019, Wednesday 1:00-4:30 PM**

Antony Alumkal, Associate Professor of Sociology of Religion

Office: Iliff 405; Email: aalumkal@iliff.edu; Office Phone: 303-765-3131

Jeremy Garber, Academic Advising and Writing Center Coordinator and Adjunct Faculty

Office: Skaggs 138; Email: jgarber@iliff.edu; Office Phone: 303-765-1146

**Course Description**

A first year introductory course is required in the MTS, MDiv, MASJE, and MAPSC programs. The purpose of these courses is to:

* Expose incoming students to the relevance of the academic, interdisciplinary study of religion and theology so they recognize from the first year of study that theological/religious studies disciplines work together to generate significant knowledge that matters to the world.
* Expose students in a collaborative way to the critical questions and issues that focus the research of the faculty.
* Provide a core first year experience and orientation to academic skills necessary for success at the graduate level.

Reading American Protestantism uses bestselling religious books as a lens through which to think about theological similarities and differences in American Protestantism, the ways in which religious ideas are packaged for popular consumption, and the ways in which different academic disciplines (sociology, history, religious studies, theology, ethics, etc.) can be used to study religious phenomena. The course is designed to build core skills necessary to be a successful student at Iliff, such as basic thesis writing using graduate-level research skills.

**Learning Goals**

The course introduces theories and methods in the study of religion and theology, and provides learning experiences able to support the following learning outcomes for students: Students identify and describe characteristic approaches to the academic study of religion related to at least four of the six curricular areas identified in the core curriculum.

1. Students demonstrate critical reading skills, such as the capacity to identify the thesis of a text, its methodology, the contextual situation of the author’s argument in a larger discourse, the contours of its argument, and the implications of its constructive work.
2. Students demonstrate the capacity to write a brief, thesis-driven paper drawing on textual resources with appropriate academic citation and a writing style appropriate to the genre.
3. Students are able to identify appropriate academic resources through library research in order to address a research question of significance to them.
4. Students engage in critical, respectful, and constructive academic dialogue and reflection in a diverse cultural setting (the classroom).
5. Student motivation, curiosity, and commitment to the engaged academic study of religion and theology increases.

**Course Expectations**

Students are expected to attend every class, except for cases of illness or family emergency. Students who are ill but functioning can join the class electronically (e.g. by Google Hangout) if necessary. It is not possible to pass the class if you miss more than two classes. Assigned readings should be completed before class meetings.

**Written Assignments**

The written assignments fulfill the goals of the class by providing you an opportunity to engage in a more detailed critical theological and religious analysis of one of the books for the course. The assignments build on each other, providing you with the opportunity to engage in a layered approach to your analysis.

1. Short Paper #1: This paper consists of two sections. In the first section is a brief overview of the book you plan to use for your final paper. At a minimum it should address the questions: What is the central argument/thesis of the book? What is the theological/theoretical framework used by the author? For the second section, you will need to find two theological sources related to the book you plan to use for your final paper. The first source should be generally supportive of the author and/or the larger religious group they represent. The second source should be generally critical. Discuss the theological perspective of the source authors, including any obvious assumptions or biases. The paper should be approximately 4 pages.

2. Short Paper #2: Write a short paper that puts the book you chose in historical context. How does the author of the book continue previous theological perspectives? Is the author introducing any new perspectives? The paper should be approximately 4 pages.

3. Final Paper: Discuss one of the books in the course in relation to its historical and theological context. Then give your own theological or normative evaluation of the book. For example, does the book promote social justice or social oppression? Are the book’s arguments intellectually sound or intellectually deficient? Of course, we expect you to incorporate material from the short papers. The paper should be approximately 10 pages.

All written assignments must use an accepted method of citation. (Hint: Go to <http://www.oxfordjournals.org/our_journals/socrel/for_authors/instructions.html> to see the citation method commonly used by sociologists. This is one of the easiest methods.)

**Grading**

Participation: 20%

Short Paper #1: 15%

Short Paper #2: 15%

Final Paper: 50%

Our assumption is that students in a masters program can be expected to produce academic work that is above average (in comparison to undergraduates). Therefore, the modal grade we assign is B+. A paper will earn a B+ if it fulfills all of the requirements of the assignment. A paper will earn a grade higher than a B+ for exceptional quality. A paper will earn a grade of B or B- if there are minor to moderate shortcomings. Grades below B- are reserved for papers with major shortcomings.

This course may be taken pass/fail, but you must request this during the first two weeks by emailing the instructors. You do *not* need to provide a justification for you request.

**Course Readings**

1. The following books are required texts for the course. (As all of these were bestsellers, you can easily find inexpensive used copies if you wish.)

Bolz-Weber, Nadia. 2013. *Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner & Saint*. New York: Jericho Books.

Borg, Marcus J. 1994*. Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus & the Heart of Contemporary Faith*. San Francisco: HarperSanFranciso.

Jakes, T. D. 2015. *Destiny: Step into Your Purpose*. New York: FaithWords.

McLaren, Brian D. 2016. *The Great Spiritual Migration: How the World's Largest Religion Is Seeking a Better Way to Be Christian*. New York: Convergent Books.

Warren, Rick. 2002. *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan. (Note: Feel free to order a later addition, but be careful not to order one of the offshoot books, like *The Purpose Driven Life Journal*.)

2. The following readings are available as pdfs on the Canvas site:

Balmer, Randall. 1993. *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Excerpt)

Griswold, Wendy. 2013. *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. Fourth Edition. Los Angeles: Sage. (Excerpt)

Marti, Gerardo and Gladys Ganiel. 2014. *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Excerpt)

Wellman, James K. 2008. *Evangelical vs. Liberal: The Clash of Christian Cultures in the Pacific Northwest*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Excerpt)

3. The following reading is available for free download.

Long, Thomas. 2017. “The Binary Christianity of Marcus Borg.” *The Christian Century*. <https://www.christiancentury.org/review/binary-christianity-of-marcus-borg>

**Schedule:**

**September 11: Course Introduction**

Viewing: *Left Behind* movie (in class)

**September 18: Evangelical and Liberal Protestant Traditions; Religion as Cultural Object**

Reading: Wellman—*Evangelical vs. Liberal*, Chapters 1-2 (Canvas)

Balmer—*Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, Chapter 2 (Canvas)

Marti and Ganiel—*The Deconstructed Church*, Introduction (Canvas)

Griswold—Culture and Societies in a Changing World, Chapter 4 (Canvas)

Academic Literacy Skills: Getting to Know the Writing Lab, Assess the Writing Situation, Write a Solid Thesis. 1.5 hours

**September 25: Popular Liberal Protestantism**

Reading: “Borg—*Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, Preface-Chapter 4

Academic Literacy Skills: Library Research. Micah Saxton, Taylor Library, 1 hour (Students look for resources relevant to their final paper.)

**October 2: Popular Liberal Protestantism**

Reading: Borg— *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, Chapters 5-6

Long—“The Binary Christianity of Marcus Borg”

<https://www.christiancentury.org/review/binary-christianity-of-marcus-borg>

Assignment Due: Submit Short Paper #1 on Canvas.

Academic Literacy Skills: Read for your Peers. 1 hour

**October 9: Popular Evangelicalism**

Reading: Warren—*The Purpose Driven Life*

The discussion will take place in Canvas this week due to Gathering Days. Log into your discussion group to take part.

**October 16: Emerging Church Movement**

Reading: Bolz-Weber—*Pastrix*

Assignment Due: Bring Short Paper #2 draft to class for peer reviewing.

**October 23: Emerging Church Movement**

Reading: McLaren—*The Great Spiritual Migration*

Find a website related to the emerging church movement.

Assignment Due: Submit Short Paper #2 on Canvas

**November 30: Prosperity/Positive Thinking Gospel**

Reading: Jakes—*Destiny*

**November 6: Compare and Contrast the Books**

No reading

Introduction to Zotero. Micah Saxton, Taylor Library

**November 13: Conclusion**

No reading

Students will review drafts of their final papers in small groups.

**November 15**

Assignment Due: Submit Final Paper on Canvas.