**MTS COLLOQUIUM**

Winter 2020

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Amy Erickson

Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible

Director, MTS Program

aerickson@iliff.edu

Course Description and Objectives

The purpose of this course is three-fold: **One**, to give students a solid grounding in the basic issues involved in the academic study of religion, by addressing the question, “What is religion and how should we study it?” **Two**, to examine the various consequences of our response to this question, in order to more sharply define our own theoretical and practical positions as active scholars and teachers in the field. **Three**, to help students formulate a viable MTS Thesis project.

Books

**Required**

Willie James Jennings, The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

Jon D. Levenson, Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

Elaine Pagels, Why Religion? A Personal Story. New York: HarperLuxe, 2018.

**Recommended** (this means I have PDFs of the assigned chapters of these books posted, but, depending on your research interests, you might want to read one or both of these books in their entireties)

Nancy Tatum Ammerman, Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life. New York, Oxford University Press, 2013.

David Chidester, Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

I will provide PDFs or links of all the other articles and chapters you will be asked to read.

Grading

**Weekly Posts**: 30%

First post due by Tuesday at midnight; responses due by Thursday at midnight.

Unless you are the first poster, you’ll be responding to the discussion questions and reflections posted by one of your peers as well as the video or audio introduction to the readings that I have posted. I want this to be a conversation, so I’d like you to limit your initial post to 3-4 sentences. But I’m also going to ask you to come back into the conversation more often (so respond to 3 or 4 of your peers), so if you think the word limit on the first post is overly restrictive, don’t worry! – there will be time to say more in your responses.

Late posts will not be accepted. Seriously. The forums are places for conversation and interaction. Once the other students have left ‘the room,’ there is no point in posting. So don’t do it (Can you tell I’ve had this happen? More than once?).

**First Poster/Discussion Starter**: 20%

\*\*Please email your discussion questions to me, Prof Erickson, **by Sunday at noon**so that I can make suggestions for refinements and revisions.

Post due by **Monday at noon** of the week for which you sign up.

*Each student will sign up to critically review and start the discussion on a week’s readings*. The student(s) assigned to be the first poster will have two basic responsibilities.

1. Post a 2-page critical summary (doubled spaced, no more than 500 words) and review of the readings for the week.

2. To kick off the class discussion, please post and present (in written, audio (Arc), or video form): a ‘snapshot’ of where you see something in the readings in the world (newspaper article, youtube video, song, piece of art, pop cultural expression). The language here is intentionally vague because I want you to be creative.

3. Articulate 3-4 (lively! interesting! timely!) questions for the class to reflect on and engage in the discussion forum. Be sure to email these to Prof E **by Sunday at noon.**

**4.** Participate in the conversation you started. Respond, respond, respond!

**Final Paper**: 50%

The task here is to think more broadly about your thesis topic, to take what we have read and learned this quarter and use it to ground your own work. In this paper, I would like you to discuss how your broader awareness of the academic study of religion informs your thinking on your thesis topic. The goal is for you to bring your research question into conversation with some of the thinkers in the study of religion we have encountered this quarter. I expect you to either 1) engage at least three of the scholars we read over the course of the quarter or 2) engage one of the scholars we read and engage that work deeply (i.e., read the whole book and other works by that person).

Schedule

**Week 1**, Introductions

**Week 2**, Religion?: What are we even talking about?

Readings: 1. [J.Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” pp. 269-84, in Mark C. Taylor, Critical Terms for Religious Studies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998)](https://iliff.instructure.com/courses/2222823/files/117040760/download?verifier=d0lpvk9HDlx5GFklAzTJEe0Wgv01Sh9HtDbRIXTd&wrap=1); 2. Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern* Concept (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), [Introduction](file:///Users/aerickson/Google%20Drive/MTS%20Colloq%2019/Nongbri%20Before_Religion_A_History_of_a_Modern_Concept_----_%28Introduction%29%20%281%29%20%281%29.pdf) and [Chapter One](file:///Users/aerickson/Google%20Drive/MTS%20Colloq%2019/Nongbri%20ch%201%20Before_Religion_A_History_of_a_Modern_Concept_----_%28One_What_Do_We_Mean_by_-Religion-_%29.pdf).

**Week 3**, Religion and Empire

Readings: 1. [Kwok Pui-lan, “2011 Presidential Address: Empire and the Study of Religion.” *JAAR*](https://iliff.instructure.com/courses/2222823/files/120082196/download?verifier=E9uwPqjzAqx5LmwrbYtJdVy9dUVtpyBlzzj9TFOn&wrap=1). 2. David Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014): [ix-24](https://iliff.instructure.com/courses/2222823/files/120081659/download?verifier=x1UA4ec4VW4djf496Kcwo906IxJ5f0EXSie786GB&wrap=1) (recommended: [25-57](https://iliff.instructure.com/courses/2222823/files/120081671/download?verifier=b4OyV48fgcjV8Rbn6U1tFj1OcOHaX8MzppUauvVu&wrap=1)), 288-313.

**Week 4**, Religion and Theology

Reading: Willie Jennings, *Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011):[1-64](https://iliff.instructure.com/courses/2222823/files/120081728/download?verifier=luSel0mBasLFh9E9fx3TUJqLO7gIiDfed3XcoTvW&wrap=1), 250-288, [289-294](https://iliff.instructure.com/courses/2222823/files/120081732/download?verifier=VTliNeRXM7XkR0G3PO785wSPnrWOB1bcDHB09RfI&wrap=1).

**Week 5**, Thesis Topics, First Try (No readings this week).

**Week 6,** Lived Religion

Reading: Nancy Tatum Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013), [Chapter 1](file:///Users/aerickson/Google%20Drive/1%20Sacred%20Stories%2C%20Spiritual%20Tribes-%20Finding%20Religion%20in%20Everyday%20Life%20Nancy%20Tatom%20Ammerman.pdf) and [Chapter 2](file:///Users/aerickson/Google%20Drive/2Sacred%20Stories%2C%20Spiritual%20Tribes-%20Finding%20Religion%20in%20Everyday%20Life%20Nancy%20Tatom%20Ammerman.pdf).

**Week 7 and 8**, Religion and Texts

Jon D. Levenson, *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

For Week 7, read 1. Levenson, pp 1-113; and 2. [Cheryl Exum, “The Accusing Look.” *Religion and the Arts* 11 (2007) 143-71](https://iliff.instructure.com/courses/2222823/files/120082201/download?verifier=aCP5KzOnA8kZcTtUxsP8OmqzzfnzU8kFQ0HH1LWi&wrap=1)

For Week 8, read Levenson, pp 113-214; 2. [Jeffrey Siker, “Abraham, Paul, and the Politics of Jewish Identity.” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 16 (2009) 56-70](https://iliff.instructure.com/courses/2222823/files/120082200/download?verifier=v6CJIqaBb3rdV763yjgVl98OJSNZUiS4GiPa19qC&wrap=1); 3. Tim Winter, “Abraham from a Muslim Perspective.” Pages 28-35 in *Abraham's Children: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Conversation*, eds. Solomon, Harries, and Winter (T & T Clark, 2005) (go to EBSCOHost to read on-line)

**Week 9**, Why Study Religion?

Elaine Pagels, *Why Religion*?

**Week 10**, Final Papers (about 5 pages, double-spaced; 1200 words max)