

# The Question of God in Modern Culture

## REL 840:222

Spring 2018  
Mondays and Thursdays  
10:55 am – 12:15 pm (Waller Hall 210)

Professor: Susan Woolever  
Office: 112 Loree Hall (Douglass Campus)  
E-mail: [sw854@religion.rutgers.edu](mailto:sw854@religion.rutgers.edu)  
Office hours: Mondays 12:30-1:30p

### Course Description

Questions faced by religion in the contemporary era: faith and reason, religious experience, role of religion in a scientific society, nature of God.

### Course Objectives

- appreciate the diversity of religious opinions in modern societies, especially as they relate to questions about god, culture, and daily life
- grasp key interconnections between religion and developments from the modern and postmodern era
- understand certain key theoretical approaches involved in the academic study of religion

### Required Texts

- Prothero, Stephen. *God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions that Run the World*. New York: HarperOne, 2010.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family: Ruling Ideologies, Diverse Realities*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2000.
- Asad, Talal. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity (Cultural Memory in the Present)*. Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Voekel, Pamela. *Alone Before God: The Religious Origins of Modernity in Mexico*. Duke University Press, 2002.
- Other required texts will be posted on Sakai.

## Expectations for Reading & Discussion

This is a course where those of us in the classroom will be collaboratively learning. The chosen readings will provide an introduction to the ways in which religion and the conception of God shape daily lives and society. Class discussion and engagement with assignments will help you develop critical thinking skills that are valuable in enhancing understanding about the traditions and societies examined. It is expected that you familiarize yourself with the assigned readings before class. Come prepared to ask questions, comment on what you have learned, draw comparisons between what you have read and what you have experienced in the past.

## Grading and Assignments

Attendance/Participation	25%
Essays (4 x 15%)	60%
Class presentations (3 x 5%)	15%

### **Attendance/Participation (25%)**

Attendance will be taken each class period. Students are allowed to miss four classes without your grade being effected. Participation and engagement is expected through coming having read the material, discussion, and presentations.

### **Essays (15% each)**

Students will write four essays over the course of the semester. A prompt will be given for each essay the week before the essay is due. The essays will be 2-3 pages single spaced and address the text we have most recently covered. See rubric on Sakai.

### **Class Presentations (5% each)**

Students will present to the class on three occasions.

The first presentation will be a group presentation. Each group will be assigned a religious tradition from the Prothero text and asked to address specific prompts outlined on rubric. See rubric on Sakai.

The other two presentations will take place over the remaining of the semester, as we are reading the Ruether, Asad, and Voekel texts. Each class period, two to three students will present on two ideas from the reading for the day. They will introduce us to each idea and posit questions for the class to discuss. Students will sign up for presentations during week two of class. See rubric on Sakai.

## Reading & Assignment Schedule

### **Week 1: Introduction to course**

Thursday, 1/18: Syllabus review and personal introductions

### **Week 2**

Monday, 1/22: What is religion and how can we study it?

- Readings on Sakai

Thursday, 1/24: Introduction to religions of the globe

- Read: Prothero, Introduction and Chapter 9
- Be prepared to work on group presentation

### **Week 3**

Monday, 1/29: Religions of the globe

- Read: assigned chapter for group work
- Be prepared to work on group presentation

Thursday, 2/1: Hinduism Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Shintoism

- Read: Prothero, associated chapters

### **Week 4**

Monday, 2/5: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Yoruba

- Read: Prothero, associated chapters

Thursday, 2/8: Religion and Western Enlightenment

- Read: Readings on Sakai

### **Week 5**

Monday, 2/12: *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family*

- Read: Reuther, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2
- Essay 1 due

Thursday, 2/15: *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family*

- Read: Reuther, Chapter 3

### **Week 6**

Monday, 2/19: *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family*

- Read: Reuther, Chapters 4 and 5

Thursday, 2/22: *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family*

- Read: Reuther, Chapters 6 and 7

### **Week 7**

Monday, 2/26: *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family*

- Read: Reuther, Chapters 8 and 9

Thursday, 3/1: Special Topic

- No reading assignment
- Essay 2 due

**Week 8**

Monday, 3/5: *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*

- Read: Asad, Introduction and Chapter 1

Thursday, 3/8: *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*

- Read: Asad, Chapters 2 and 3

**Week 9: SPRING BREAK**

Monday, 3/12: NO CLASS

Thursday, 3/15: NO CLASS

**Week 10**

Monday, 3/19: *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*

- Read: Asad, Chapter 4

Thursday, 3/22: *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*

- Read: Asad, Chapter 5

**Week 11**

Monday, 3/26: *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*

- Read: Asad, Chapter 6

Thursday, 3/29: *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*

- Read: Asad, Chapter 7

**Week 12**

Monday, 4/2: Special Topic

- No reading assignment
- Essay 3 due

Thursday, 4/5: *Alone Before God*

- Read: Voekel, Introduction and Chapter 1

**Week 13**

Monday, 4/9: *Alone Before God*

- Read: Voekel, Chapter 2

Thursday, 4/12: *Alone Before God*

- Read: Voekel, Chapters 3 and 4

**Week 14**

Monday, 4/16: *Alone Before God*

- Read: Voekel, Chapter 5

Thursday, 4/19: NO CLASS—Professor out of town

**Week 15**

Monday, 4/23: *Alone Before God*

- Read: Voekel, Chapters 6 and 7

Thursday, 4/26: *Alone Before God*

- Read: Voekel, Chapter 8 and Conclusion

**Week 16: Finals Week**

- Essay 4 due