

Methodist University
REL 1060: Religion in American Culture
Syllabus for Fall Term II 2015

Instructor: Logan M. Isaac

Times: Mondays & Wednesdays, 1730-2000 hrs (5:30-8:00pm)

Location: Room F-116, Fort Bragg Training & Education Center (Methodist University satellite campus)

Email: iamloganmi@gmail.com

****No Office Hours, Email in advance for advising or consultation.**

University Mission, Departmental Goals, and Additional Course Policies and Information:

See Addendum on page 5

REQUIRED TEXT BOOKS:

- Claiborne, Shane and Haw, Chris. *Jesus for President: Politics for Ordinary Radicals*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008.
- Lee, Richard: *God's Promises to an American Patriot* (Thomas Nelson, 2011)
 - Optional: *In God We Still Trust* (Thomas Nelson, 2011) or *The American Patriot's Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009)
- Meacham, Jon. *American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation*. New York, NY: Random House, 2007.
- Prothero, Stephen. *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.

***Additional required and recommended reading will be announced throughout the course and emailed to students in PDF format.*

COURSE DESCRIPTION & GOALS

As a religiously affiliated school, Methodist University requires students to take at least one course that deals primarily with the Judeo-Christian tradition. This course fulfills that requirement and introduces students to the scholarly consideration of religion and culture as a way of exploring their enduring significance. While this course does not require prior biblical knowledge or a particular faith commitment on the part of its participants, the nature of religion suggests that each is considered sacred by adherent communities and should be treated with respect.

Given the enduring significance of religion and culture in selecting scriptures and practices to study, we will explore the assigned extra-biblical texts' contemporary and theological relevance thereto, but only peripherally. We will be reading the selected texts in light of the stated historical context before sharing our perceptions about what, how and why the authors are trying to say. This way, our opinions will be critically

informed and students will be prepared for invigorating discourse across religious and ideological differences.

Keeping up with the assigned readings is essential to success in this course.

Although there will be an emphasis on in-class discussion throughout this course, a careful reading of the assigned material is essential. Because of the diverse selection of texts, written from several perspectives and emerging out of many different contexts, we all have to be careful to listen closely to one another and be cognizant of and respectful to one another's unique and valid convictions. Differing perspectives are welcome and encouraged, though for the sake of consistency and expediency, only one will determine course progress – that of the instructor. It is the responsibility of each student to keep alert for supplementary instructions in class, over email, or within Blackboard.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- 20% Participation and Attendance.
- 40% Reflection Paper/s
- 40% Final Exam

Notice the emphasis on attendance and in-class participation. Critically engaging with the texts in question is a focus of this course and reading alone will not adequately prepare students to succeed in this course. To calculate Midterm Grades, there may be short pop quizzes to gauge student progress and attention, which will contribute to the Participation and Attendance category. Come to class prepared to discuss the assigned readings, which means reading the assigned texts prior to the weeks in which they appear below (example – have Meacham, chapter 1 read *before* January 13th).

Grading Scale for all assignments in the course;

A	= 100-93%	B-	= 82-80%	D+	= 69-67%
A-	= 92-90%	C+	= 79-77%	D	= 66-63%
B+	= 89-87%	C	= 76-73%	D-	= 62-60%
B	= 86-83%	C-	= 72-70%	F	= less than 60%

I. PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE (Attentive Presence)

Students should plan ahead to attend every class session and are required notify the instructor by email of absences that are known in advance. Students in introductory classes that are required for graduation may not miss any more than 20% of classes for the course, at which point an automatic “Withdraw, Failing” (WF) grade is generated and the student will be involuntarily dropped from the class. To keep this from happening, attendance will be taken every day and those in danger of being dropped may be notified by the instructor based on the instructor's own discretion, but *it is the responsibility of each student* to show up for class consistently and track their own attendance. However, in order to achieve the highest grade in this category, students must engage with the material either in verbal discussion in class, online in discussion groups, or directly with the instructor. Attendance alone does not guarantee the best grade.

II. REFLECTION PAPER/S (Critical Thinking)

Each student will be responsible for writing no more than two 3-5 page (12 point Times New Roman font, double spaced) reflections on their chosen text prior to the week they have signed up for. These papers will act as guides for discussion and the student will be expected to take an active role in conversation that evening. Each paper will include a synopsis of the assigned reading, critical engagement with the author in question, and a few questions for discussion in class. Papers are due to the instructor 24 hours prior to the class date that the student has signed up for and uploaded to blackboard within 24 hours after, with any needed adjustments based on class discussion.

II. FINAL EXAM (Information Recall)

The Final Exam is a multiple choice-type test meant to measure memory and recollection of anecdotal information to display students' ability to remember basic information on people and events discussed in the texts assigned and in class. Test will be cumulative and a study guide may or may not be provided, so students should plan on keeping thorough notes. Students are encouraged to study in groups and take notes throughout the course to aide in preserving information and strengthening their potential exam score.

The Final Exam schedule can be found here: <http://www.methodist.edu/exam-schedules>. The last regular class day for Fall 2015 Evening Term II is Monday, December 14th.

- **Final Exam specifics will be determined and announced no later than (NLT) December 1st .**

COURSE SCHEDULE

To supplement the following schedule, be sure to review Methodist University's Academic Calendar: <http://www.methodist.edu/academic-calendar>

- **Week 1**
 - **Oct.19:** Introductions to one another and to relevant concepts
 - **Oct.21:** Robert Bellah & American Civil Religion
- **Week 2**
 - **Oct.26:** Jon Meacham, Introduction & Ch.1
 - **Oct.28:** Meacham, Ch.2
- **Week 3**
 - **Nov.2:** Meacham, Ch.3
 - **Nov.4:** Meacham, Ch.4
- **Week 4**
 - **Nov.9:** Meacham, Ch.5
 - ~~Nov.11:~~ NO CLASS (Veterans Day/Martinmas holiday)
- **Week 5** – *American Patriots* (Lee selections)
 - **Nov.16:**
 - **Nov.18:**
- **Week 6** – *Jesus for President* (Claiborne & Haw selections)
 - **Nov.23:**
 - **Nov.25:**
- **Week 7**
 - **Nov.30:** *American Jesus* (Prothero selections)

- **Dec.2:** Meacham, ch.6 & Prothero conclusion.
- **Week 8**
 - **Dec.7:**
 - **Dec.9:** Final Exam(?)

FINAL EXAM:

(Details to be determined. Watch for email or Blackboard announcement)

ADDENDUM TO RELIGION SYLLABI:

University Mission and Departmental Goals:

The mission of Methodist University is to develop responsible members of society by providing an education firmly grounded in the liberal arts, committed to nurturing moral values and ethical decision-making, and is designed to prepare students for a variety of careers.

The purpose of the Department of Philosophy and Religion:

The purpose of the Department of Philosophy and Religion is to introduce students both to philosophical and religious traditions—particularly Western, but including others—and in the spirit of the liberal arts tradition to engender critical thinking in these areas.

Goal 1: Students who complete the core requirements in philosophy and religion will have a general knowledge of principal philosophical and religious traditions.

Goal 2: Students who complete the core requirements in philosophy and religion will be conversant with critical thinking.

Goal 3: Students who complete a minor in philosophy or a minor/major in religion will be prepared to enter professional or graduate studies.

See above for course goals (student learning outcomes) and requirements (assessments).

Core/General Education requirements in Religion:

For the B.A., B.S., B.S.W., and A.A. in General Studies, 6 semester hours, at least 3 of which must deal primarily with the Judeo-Christian tradition. For the B.M., B.F.A., A.S., and A.A. with a Subject Concentration, core requirement in Religion, the 3 semester hours must deal primarily with the Hebrew-Christian tradition. Neither 103 (Introduction to Religion) nor REL 150 (Eastern Religious Traditions) may be used to fulfill the 3 semester hours Judeo-Christian tradition

Requirement.

Core/General Education Competencies in Religion – Humanities:

Humanities: The human condition is influenced by multiple cultures, belief systems, and traditions. Courses in the humanities provide students with a rich variety of ways to interpret and understand the world.

Writing-Enrichment Courses:

According to University policy, each student, day or evening, must take at least one writing– enriched course in his/her major field. REL 352, 405, and 406 can be used to meet this requirement. Other courses can be used with special permission from the instructor.

University Attendance Policy:

Missing more than 20% of any 100 level classes for any reason, excused or not, will result in being withdrawn from the course and given a WF. Additional, possibly stricter, attendance policies are set by each instructor— see the rest of the syllabus for information.

University Email Policy:

Students have been issued an email account ending in @student.methodist.edu. All students are responsible for checking their e-mail daily for messages from the University.

Students with Disabilities and Additional Writing Assistance:

Any student requiring accommodations due to one or more disabilities must bring the appropriate documentation to the Methodist University Center for Personal Development no later than the first week of classes during the semester in which the accommodations are required. Together the student and personnel of the Center for Personal Development will decide upon the accommodations to be implemented. Students desiring assistance with written assignments should contact the Writing Center. Also, in both cases please feel free to contact the professor.

Honor Code:

Learning best occurs in an environment of trust and mutual respect. It also requires accountability. As such, cheating, plagiarism, improper citations (whether intentional or not), lying and/or academic misrepresentation can result in a zero on an assignment or a failing grade for the course, at the discretion of the instructor. It will also be reported to the Academic Standards Committee. Rude comments and/or disruptive actions, whether directed toward other students or toward the instructor, and whether spoken aloud or sent privately through email, negatively affect the learning environment and can also result in penalties ranging from a zero on participation to an F for the course, again at the discretion of the instructor.

Inattentive behavior can negatively affect one's participation grade, and serious disturbances

can result in expulsion from the course. If in doubt about any of the above, please ask the instructor for clarification. See catalogue for further information.

Honor Code: Course Etiquette:

Your instructor wants this to be an enjoyable, engaging and worthwhile class and, as such, is willing to work with you to help you achieve the goals you set. Toward that end we will all want to keep in mind some (hopefully common sense) rules of etiquette.

University Policy: “Students are expected to interact with other students, the instructor, and any teaching assistants or technical support staff enrolled in the course just as they would be expected to do in a traditional classroom setting. Because online courses contain a combination of communication channels, some public and some private, such as e-mail, instant messaging, discussion forums, and chat rooms, inappropriate conduct in these channels is not allowed. Examples of inappropriate conduct that are never permitted include sexually harassing language, racially or ethnically degrading language, profanity, and verbally abusive language. Evidence of any of these represents grounds for dismissal from the course by the Assistant Dean for Distance Education. In general, the discussion of personal matters, such as questioning a grade, is inappropriate for public forums. These matters may be addressed privately through e-mail, provided none of the conduct listed above occurs in that communication.

Additional requirements: The goal of the honor code is not to be arbitrary, but to promote the free exchange of ideas in a safe and respectful manner. Behavior that interferes with the smooth running of the course is to be avoided. As such disrespectful or overly confrontational comments, whether directed toward other students or toward the instructor, and whether posted publicly on the discussion board or sent privately through email, will result in points being deducted from one’s participation grade—the goal of participation is to facilitate mutual learning, while obviously in-your-face comments negatively affect course morale by shutting down dialogue. Determination of inappropriate comments and behavior lies in the hands of the instructor, and so if in doubt about a comment, please ask the instructor. Or if you find yourself struggling with something in the course, or are unsure of why you received a certain grade, please feel free to contact the instructor. The instructor is committed to making this a worthwhile and fun course, and if we all work together, we should have no problem achieving this goal.

Honor Code: Cheating and Use of Proper Citations:

It should also go without saying that cheating, in whatever form it occurs, is a serious act of disrespect—both towards the professor and towards one’s fellow students. It is also stealing, as it robs value from those who do not cheat. As such cheating will not be tolerated. Any act of cheating will result in an F for the assignment or, depending on the severity and at the discretion of the instructor, an F for the course. Acts of cheating will also be **reported**

to Methodist University Honor Committee and can result in more serious penalties, including suspension or expulsion from Methodist University.

IMPORTANT: You MUST cite any sources that you use in your writing (on exams, papers, and discussion boards), including any web sites that you consult. Copying and pasting material from a web site or paraphrasing material found there without a citation constitutes an act of plagiarism and is a violation of the honor code. In general any verbatim phrase that is more than three or four words long MUST be put under quotation marks, and any paraphrasing of content that you did not already have in your head (and content that is not general knowledge to an average undergraduate) must include a citation as to its original source. If you are not confident in your use of citations, please contact the instructor or stop by the Writing Center for help.