

Religious Studies 2730G**Location:** W4**Day(s):** Tuesdays**Time:** 2:30-5:30**Instructor(s):** William Acres**Contact info:** wacres@uwo.ca bacres@gtn.net**Course Syllabus:****Purpose of the course:**

What we are looking at in this course is some explorations of the materialist idea of Religion—how we define things as profane (outside the temple) or as having religious significance; as having specifically religious meaning; and of religious meaning as being a part of or a shaping of something we call culture. These definitions are simple: what we think of the world in which we live.

In this study, we will look at:

- the ideas of nature and the body;
- the role of the reader/actor in finding religion
- history, culture, and narration
- the pure and the impure;
- the building of the temples and the making of sacred objects;
- the development of hierarchies, order, power;
- how and where can we begin the study of religion in our own worlds: personal, virtual, media, technology, knowledge?

The Course:

Beginning with the body, its immense powers and generative imagination, we see also the basic element of human-in-Religion. Religions may, and do, define qualities and practices, often ethically based, for the good use of the body; equally, Religions have theories, texts and narratives for what and how bodies are situated within their physical spaces.

How we know, or ontology as it is called, what is going on around us has points of origin in the sense, construction and potential of the body itself. When we think of materiality, the material cultures, it is from the basic bodily practices and principles of what a body is and does that all elements proceed. This can be very simple: if I am a vegetarian it may be over an objection to meat, slaughtered for human consumption; but if I have an objection to certain kinds of food it may also issue from deep currents of practice about what is permissible and impermissible.

Rules bind religions, rituals and practices unite those who follow the rules. So, we might not see change or development or advance and decay; we might see that everything is the same. On the other hand, when we examine how the very notion of what Religion is changes, so do the aspects of the religious, particularly material culture. I would hold, here, that this is often the result of profound changes in

approach which have resulted from more and more human interaction (often violent, sometimes not) in which we learn and engage and exchange our ideas of the material world.

These two forms—idea and matter-- always interact, at least in Western consciousness. What we mean by Western consciousness is not, of course, a purely religious thing: but we will begin by looking at the rational mind, the mechanical body, the hierarchical and measured worlds we take for granted. Then, we will step back.

Looking at a human body is one way of doing this. What we decide is physical or material depends on the work of making that definition: it could be the work of *dharmā* or the collective karmic energies focused by meditation and chanting, by actions and holy intentions; or, it could be the work of will, of self, of autonomy working within Western systems which depend, in turn, on the existence of those self-definitions. If we look at Religion as a concept, we can be sure that many writers and thinkers will help us understand how we might shape our own concepts. But we cannot ignore the physical or material world in which we make our actions, or cultures, and bear the consequences of our decisions on resources, on wealth, on food, on consumption, on sharing or not.

In this course we will look at a series of presentations and lectures followed by seminars. The first part of the course, until Reading Week, will have selected readings and lectures on various themes. These will include: what do we mean by 'material culture'—how does our idea of culture shape define what and how we think of religious and non-religious materials? You will write your reflections during these four weeks in the form of a journal—you may use weblinks, your own experiences, reflections, ideas, and observations in these short assignments.

We will look at a series of selected topics: ecclesiastical vesture, art, music, garbage, self-help, capital and the consumer mentality.

What is Religion? I am using my own work as an overall guide with readings and questions as the core background text to the course. This is *Exploring Religion: A Reader*. Religion is discussed here as a kind of conversation using helpful primary texts. The overall idea is that there can be no final, single or universally known truth. It is a discourse which moves through human constructions and material worlds, taking divergent and convergent definitions. You will hone your own positions in reflecting on the guest speaker's ideas; and then put them to work as you present a core text and series of ideas using the reader during the last five weeks of the course.

PART ONE: Introductory Lectures: Weeks 2-3, no assignments due

We will begin with:

January 12: General Introduction

January 19, 2016: Introduction: the body, the mind and the discourses of Religion

Three bodies in search of a viewpoint: the eastern, the western and the dissolution of the gap

Wade Davis, <http://www.divamaverickmavens.com/main/2010/02/fortune-hunters-and-explorers.html>

Davis gives a sort of western explanation for humanity and the development of culture. It is an introductory idea, but three things to note:

- he uses a universalist idea of human life and experience, construction and development;
- he uses a Kantian model—that all human difference is accidental, and fundamental similarities remain;
- he employs, therefore, a mono-cultural explanation for all human existence, including religion and materiality; one that assumes a common history, a future collaboration, and a narrative which points to eventual human unity. In so doing he assumes also fundamental ideas of human consciousness, autonomy, stages of progression and the teleology (end point) of all human activity as exemplified in global communications (the result of reading the past into the present).
- Now, consider two vastly different, physically-based, practices (religious) which do not emerge from consciousness or autonomy. Ji-qong (Chinese) and *rasas* (Hindu acts of physical devotion)

Yasuchika Konno: Tao technique, used here in the Japanese form of Butoh—he is practising an advanced breathing technique Ji-qong: here http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sit5lexze_I and here <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aejF60L5-mg>. This is not really Butoh, as in the title (that is a Japanese performance genre which channels spirits—a movement developed in conscious protest against the secularization and industrialization of Japan at the expense of older spiritual traditions, a re-invention, as it were). Ji-gong is from the ancient *ching* of Chinese practices. It is a breathing technique on display here, practised and taught by the masters—the body is the bearer of a different kind of consciousness in which the rational mind is suspended entirely, and the flow of energies is experienced immediately within a space. None of it is choreographed. Konno, though young, is considered a master—he is also a frequent performer in Japan.

Hindu rasas: the physical acts of devotion (Bakhti) to the idols, dolls, avatars of the great Hindu gods and goddesses—these are not text-based for most Hindus; even if most Hindus give daily puja (meditation, prayers), these are not the same as the body-centered approaches of the rasas: here <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZj46KGMk3Y> and here http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNiTnhB_uvQ (start at 4:04 to see how little kids learn this at a Hindu school in Atlanta); and here where the very slightest body movement is more important than the text: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCK-gUIsEtU&feature=related>

Ronald Inden: Hobbes' masculine, mechanical actor goes to India: webct, *Imagining India* (1992) (alternate reading) gives an explanation as to why what have been called the 'western' and the 'eastern' bear fundamental differences in how the body is used in material cultures.

There are distinctions of course; Jewish diets (Kushrot) and Islamic Halal); prayer (Islam); the Christian liturgies. A point raised here will be the centrality of text and spoken commentary (sermon) for edification, as opposed to body practices, one of the effects of the Christian Reformation of the Sixteenth Century.

Intro: Acres, (*Exploring Religion: A Reader*, Oxford, 2014), Introduction

January 27: Religion's places, spaces and time

Acres, *Exploring Religion*, Intro and Chapter One selections

Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* (43BCE), excerpt from Books II and VII with introduction

Max Weber, *Protestant Work Ethic*, excerpt with intro

Courtney Bender, *God's Love We Deliver*

February 9: Materialist worlds, cultural definitions, Acres, Chapter Three

PART TWO: Special lectures: Acres, Chapters Three, Four, Five (these readings will be done over the following three weeks), Four short reflections (40% due): using previous lecture materials we will begin to look at some specialized uses of various understandings of religion as conceived materially. These run from January 30 to February 27. The due dates are February 6, 13, 27, March 3.

February 16: Finance, probability and the religious worlds of wealth, land and empire

Dr. Bill Acres, Dr. David Bellhouse, powerpoint presentation only (posted on WebCT), reflection for the following week

We are not used to thinking of business as an outgrowth of mathematical theory; nor are we used to the idea that this notion of probability, or risk, used theological concepts of a revolutionary nature—the span of a human life as the root of actuarial tables posed serious ethical questions for religious people, especially if the span of a human life was known only to God; and if land, the creation of the Almighty was vested in the rulers and nobles, how could a market of speculation in annuities (based on land) completely alter the ancient order of social and theological norms? This lecture was given at the 350th anniversary conference for the Royal Society in London in the summer of 2010. The mathematics will be explained simply; the religious implications for markets and capital will be obvious, as will the usefulness of land surveys, valuations and revenue for future imperial expansion and colonial domination.

February 23: Vesture and religious functions

Rev. TBA reflection for the following week

Reading TBA—this lecture is experiential as the texts, objects and place will be discussed when we are in it. Canon Cliff will use material examples of memory as embodied in objects, clothing, patterns, and give a history of how we remember ourselves through religious objects, encompassing texts, people, interactions with human experiences of the past and the future—objects which are transitory, material, but which are evidence of embodied faith and practices of the distant past in ways not possible in academic history alone.

March 1: **Music, art and performance: mixing the media in the modern world**

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) Symphony Number 8 (Symphony of a Thousand) YouTube <http://www.musicweb-international.com/Mahler/Mahler8.htm> for some background; Mahler converted to Catholicism from Judaism to receive the Court appointment of director of the Vienna Opera, and in Symphony Number Eight two major texts are incorporated into a massive celebration of Mahler's own spirituality: the ancient hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* is a text set for an immense orchestra and several choruses in Part One; in Part Two, the setting of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's (1749—1832) *Faustus*, explores the intensity of human experience, of good and evil, and its resolution in universal creativity---the feminine principle, *Ewige, ewige*—culminating in what is possibly one of the most transcendent endings to any music ever written.

Dr. Stephen McClatchie, Principal of Huron University College, Professor of Musicology (History). He is world-renowned authority on Gustav Mahler, and has published extensively from the Alfred Rose collection at UWO's Faculty of Music—Rose was the concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic and the Opera and knew Mahler personally. His widow settled in London, Ontario and gave the papers to the University. McClatchie was the first scholar to make extensive use of the materials in two distinguished monographs and editions. Here, he explores the intersection of the sacred-secular text, the performance in concert hall as secular/public space, and Mahler's own highly complex journey from Judaism to forced conversion; and the resilience of his earlier love for eastern European Jewish musical forms as settings for Christian/Classical texts. And, then, there is the orchestra with the maestro as exemplary of the late-Nineteenth and early-Twentieth century national organization under the leader (fuhrer), with all parts together and perfect. The symphony is almost prophetic in imagining the end of empires, the fusion of parts of modernity (postmodernity) in a single piece.

Reflection for February 24

March 8, Acres, Chapter Six, Seven, Eight (done for the first seminar presentations)
Sharon Lindenburger, '**Self-help, Religion and the Discourses of Abundance**', reflection due the following week (March 6)
Reading: Weber (again)

More information about Lindenburger can be found at <http://www.editors.ca/profile/7653/sharon-lindenburger>

PART THREE: Seminars and papers: Weeks 9-13: Detailed discussion of this project on January 27, 2016. Each seminar is worth 20% of your final grade; the paper is worth 25%.

March 15: **Images and the body**: Diana Eck, *Darsan*, core reading, **Acres, Chapter Five**—Eck, Masuzawa, Cantwell Smith (Paper due April 5)
March 22: **Wealth and poverty: the spiritual and economic conditions**: **Acres, Chapter Nine** (Paper due April 5)
March 29: **Sacred earth and religion**, **Acres, Chapter Ten (core texts, Taylor and Cole)** (Paper due April 5)
March 29: **Radicals and Nations; Acres, Chapters Six and Seven (core texts)**(Paper due April 7)
April 5: **Religion in media/advertising: the appropriation of the sacred or a new version of the sacred?** (Paper due April 12—final papers cannot be due in the final week of term according to Senate regulations but this can be negotiated until April 12 with the students' permission)

PART FOUR: Final reflection: handed out on March 29: due April 12. This will be a short investigation of the worlds you live in, bringing together a kind of summary (provisional) sense of where and how religion is manifest in various ways in your personal experiences as well as a view of the course materials overall. It will take the form of a short essay of not more than 1200 words with sources, bibliography, notes, and critical apparatus.

Non-medical absences and lateness: for each assignment a late penalty of 2% per day (including weekends) will be levied. Papers and reflections will not be accepted after seven days. If a student is absence for reasons other than non-medical, it will be necessary to discuss the reasons and any lateness resulting from their absence with the Instructor. Permission will be contingent on valid reasons. Non-valid reasons: employment, family functions (except funerals and close family members' illnesses), workload problems with other courses; in some instances, a grade will be withheld until proper documentation (illness of a close family member; death certificate) is forthcoming. All inquiries should be directed through the office of the Dean of Theology's assistant, Ms. Sandra Rice at srice@uwo.ca, or by telephone at 519-438-7224, x 289.

Course Materials:

William Acres, *Exploring Religion : A Reader* (Oxford University Press, 2014) (Bookstore under RS 2730)

Assignments & Method of Evaluation of Assignments:

Assignments:

The short (750 words) critical reflections on the guest lectures (4 x 10%), due each week following the guest lectures: these will take the form of what is essentially a journal, the creation of a narration of what connotes religion using a focused observation on key aspects of guest lecturer's specialties.

During the lecture phase of the course (to March 2) this is especially important as you will be expected to be preparing:

- a seminar (20%), see weeks from early March to early April (five weeks)
- a short research paper of 2000-2500 words in length on the topic you choose (weeks March 10-April 7) (25%) due in the week following your presentation.

There will be a short take-home final reflection on your own and other's materials used in this course. This paper will be handed out at the March 31, 2015 class and will be due on April 12, 2015 worth 15%.

Detailed outlines of these assignments will be put onto WebCT together with due dates.

A document for grading procedures will also be uploaded into WebCT.

These assignments will be discussed in detail during our class on January 27, 2015.

Due dates: reflections are due one week after the guest lecture; seminars as signed up; and the paper on the seminar is due *one week after the presentation* with the exception of the final seminar where the paper is due April 12 (but listed as April 7, as above), the second last week of term; final reflection due April 12.

Attendance at all classes is considered mandatory.

Additional Statements:

1. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices during Tests and Exams

It is not appropriate to use technology (such as, but not limited, to laptops, PDAs, cell phones) in the classroom for non-classroom activities. Such activity is disruptive and is distracting to other students and to the instructor, and can inhibit learning. Students are expected to respect the classroom environment and to refrain from inappropriate use of technology and other electronic devices in class.

2. **Statement on Academic Offences:** Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following web site: <http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2014/pg113.html>.

3. **Support Services:**

- UWO Registrar's Office: <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>
- Huron's Faculty of Theology, Office of the Dean:
http://www.huronuc.on.ca/faculty_of_theology/info_for_current_students
- Faculty of Theology office: srice@uwo.ca, 519-438-7224, ext. 289
- Huron's Writing Skills Centre: http://www.huronuc.on.ca/student_life/writing_services
- UWO's Mental Health website: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to this website for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.
- UWO Student Support and Development Services:
http://communications.uwo.ca/current_students/student_services.htm

4. **Accommodation for absences:**

If documentation is required for either medical or non-medical academic accommodation, then such documentation must be submitted by the student directly to your Faculty's Dean's office (or academic counselor), and not to the instructor. For the Faculty of Theology, all such documentation must be submitted to room A227. It will be the Dean's office that will determine if accommodation is warranted.

- a) **Non-medical absences:** If you require a non-medical absence from class (attendance is mandatory) and the reason is known in advance you must submit this request through the Dean of Theology's office by contacting Sandra Rice either by email, srice@uwo.ca, or by phone 519-438-7224 x 289. Marks for late work will be deducted at 2% per day including weekends. Work which is late without reasonable accommodation will *not* be accepted after seven days' lateness. A clear indication of all assignments and attendance is given in this outline. Exceptions to these expectations must be stated clearly and either in writing or by email. Attendance is part of the final grade for participation.
- b) **Medical absences:** See also the Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness —Undergraduate Students, at <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medical.pdf>

For work representing 10% or more of the overall grade for the course, a student must present documentation indicating that the student was seriously affected by illness and could not reasonably be expected to meet his/her academic responsibilities. Documentation must be submitted as soon as possible to your Faculty Dean's office (Huron Arts & Social Science

students should take their documentation to the Academic Counsellor, through the Academic Services Centre at Huron), together with a Request for Relief specifying the nature of the accommodation requested. The request and documentation will be assessed and appropriate accommodation will be determined by the Dean's office in consultation with the instructor(s.) Academic accommodation will be granted ONLY where the documentation indicates that the onset, duration and severity of the illness are such that the student could not reasonably be expected to complete his/her academic responsibilities.

The UWO Student Medical Certificate (SMC) and Request for Relief are available at the Student Centre website (<https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm>), Huron University College Academic Counselling website (www.huronuc.on.ca) or from the Dean's Office or Academic Services Centre at Huron.