

RELI 342:
Religious Pluralism in America

Messiah College
Fall 2019

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Class Location: Boyer 277
Class Time: MWF 9:00-9:50 a.m.

Office: Boyer 101E
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Office Hours: MW, 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m., TR 3:00-4:00 p.m.

Course Description

This course fulfills a QuEST (General Education) requirement for Pluralism in Contemporary Society, as well a major requirement for Biblical and Religious Studies majors (Religion concentration). The catalog description reads as follows:

RELI 342: Religious Pluralism in America. Examines issues related to religious pluralism in the United States, both past and present. Topics to be considered include the breadth of religious diversity, the expanding role of various forms of spirituality in contemporary America, the notion that America is a Christian nation, and the ideals and limits of religious freedom as a legal construct and social value. Prerequisite: IDCR 151. Meets General Education Pluralism in Contemporary Society requirement.

From the time Europeans colonized North America, religious pluralism has been the norm on the American landscape. Native Americans, Catholics, Protestants, and Jews all sought to carve out spaces to practice their respective faiths, producing in the process a remarkably diverse religious landscape. Later, the founders of the new nation sought to guarantee religious liberty by law. Today, both religious liberty and religious pluralism are considered hallmarks of American life.

Even so, many people in the course of American history have struggled to practice their faith as they see fit. Religious differences have often sparked tensions, and adherents of some religions have sought to assert their power at the expense of others. Although the United States has been less religiously violent than many places in the world, tensions between religious groups seem never to subside. Some observers think America would be better off if its citizens would assume a more secular outlook.

Moreover, the legal frameworks designed to allow for the flourishing of American religious pluralism, such as the infamous concept of the “separation of church and state,” have been contested and controversially applied. At times, the state has appeared to favor some religions over others; they also sometimes sorted religions into categories of “good” and “bad,” and sanctioned only those they deemed acceptable.

Politicians, judges, and other public figures also often operated out of a de facto Protestant mindset.

All this raises questions about the nature of religion in America. Why has United States maintained such a high level of religiosity when so many other industrialized nations have become so secular? How has the United States managed to be so religious and so secular at the same time? Does religion contribute to the public good, or does it detract from it? What are the responsibilities and obligations of the state vis a vis religion? If some people's religious convictions detract from other peoples' welfare, should religion be limited or constrained in some way?

These are just a few of the questions we'll be exploring in this course, one that I'm very glad to be teaching. Thanks so much for taking this class. I look forward to getting to know each of you in the months ahead, and I'll do my best to make this a positive learning experience for everyone.

Course Texts

Fea, John. *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2018. ISBN 978-0-8028-7641-6.

Manzullo-Thomas, Devin. *Coursepack for RELI 342: Religious Pluralism in America*. Grantham, Pa.: Messiah College Press, 2019.

Mouw, Richard. *Talking with Mormons: An Invitation to Evangelicals*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012. ISBN 978-0802868589.

Tisby, Jemar. *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2019. ISBN 0310597269.

* N.B.: In addition to these required course texts, I will occasionally assign shorter texts, including films, podcasts, images, and more, as part of the assignments for this course. See the schedule below for details.

Course Objectives & Methods of Assessment

By the end of this course, you will have demonstrated to me that you have successfully achieved all of the course goals listed below. The extent of your success in achieving those goals will determine the final grade that you receive for the course (A–F). In the chart below, I list each of the course goals and then indicate which of our course requirements I'll use to determine whether or not you have successfully achieved a given goal.

All of this may sound very cold, formal, and structured—and, to a certain extent, it is. Rest assured that the class itself won't be as cold, formal, and structured as this chart

may suggest. My responsibility as the instructor is to make sure that your learning, as students, matches the goals that I and my department have set for this course. Thus, the chart.

By the completion of the course, students will demonstrate the ability to:

<u>Course Goal*</u>	<u>Method(s) of Assessment</u>
A. Outline contemporary issues arising out of the pluralism of race, ethnicity, social class, gender, disability, and/or religion	Exams, Response Papers, Unessay
B. Examine contemporary society from diverse viewpoints and through these increase self-knowledge	Response Papers, Class Discussions
C. Explain some effects of inequality, prejudice, and discrimination	Exams, Response Papers
D. Articulate and practice an informed and faithful Christian response to diversity	Response Papers
E. Explain the social and political underpinnings for America's religious diversity (e.g., immigration, toleration, and disestablishment)	Exams, Response Papers, Unessay
F. Describe ways in which various religious groups have experienced religiously-based discrimination in the course of American history	Exams, Response Papers, Unessay
G. Identify the significance of, and the reasons for, the growing proportion of Americans who identify themselves as "spiritual but not religious"	Exams, Response Papers

* Objectives A-D are standard for all General Education Pluralism courses; Objectives E-G are unique to this particular course.

Course Delivery

This course will operate through a combination of seminar-style discussions and lectures. Therefore, class discussion will constitute a significant portion of the course. Sometimes we'll discuss ideas and issues as a whole class, and other times we'll break

into smaller groups of three or four students. In both contexts—the small groups and the larger classroom—please be honest but tactful, sensitive but forthright, as you express your opinions.

Course Expectations

In order to get the most out of this class, you must do the following:

1. **Attend and participate in class.** Although I may not take daily attendance, you are expected to be here each day. You are also expected to contribute to our class discourse, both in large- and small-group settings.
2. **Read, view, or listen to the assigned materials before class.** Lectures will mostly supplement the readings; they will not repeat them. Our discussions, which will constitute major parts of many class periods, will operate on the assumption you've read the assigned readings (or watched the assigned video, or listened to the assigned podcast, etc.) carefully.
3. **Complete ten response papers of approximately 500 words each.** These responses will require you to answer a question or questions related to the assigned reading for a particular day. They must be typewritten responses, completed on your own, that demonstrate you've read the material and thought carefully about it.
4. **Complete an unessay on a topic of your choice related to a historical or contemporary issue concerning religious pluralism in America, and share the content of your unessay during an in-class presentation.** More details on this assignment will be distributed later in the semester.
5. **Complete three exams.** Anything covered in this course—including readings, lectures, videos, discussions, and student presentations—is fair game for the exams, so you'll need to be an engaged learner at all times.

Grading:

In RELI 342, I'll calculate your final grade for the semester based on the following criteria:

1. **Attendance and Discussion Participation.** Participation is worth 100 points. If you attend class every day, you'll receive at least 75 of these points. However, only those who participate actively and regularly in class will receive 85 points or more. Active and regular participation means coming to class well prepared for the day's activities (texts read, conversation paper written and in hand, etc.), making multiple meaningful contributions to class discussion, listening critically to others, and abiding by the class Laptop and Cellphone Policy outlined on the next page.

2. **Response Papers.** The ten response papers are worth 20 points each and will be graded according to the organization and thoughtfulness of the response. They are due by class time, via Canvas. Except in cases of illness or family emergency, I will not accept late response papers.

3. **Unessay and Class Presentation.** This assignment, along with the presentation at the end of the semester, is worth 200 points total (50 points for the annotated bibliography, 100 points for the unessay, 50 points for the presentation). I'll distribute my expectations for producing a quality unessay and presentation later in the semester. I'll also provide a grading rubric at that time as well.

4. **Exams.** Each of the three exams is worth 100 points.

Thus, your final grade for this course will be determined as follows:

Attendance & Participation	10%
Response Papers	10%
Unessay & Presentation	20%
Exam #1	20%
Exam #2	20%
Exam #3	20%

Your course letter grade will be assigned according to the following percentages:

93-100	A	77-79	C+
90-92	A-	73-76	C
87-89	B+	70-72	C-
83-86	B	67-69	D+
80-82	B-	60-66	D
		< 60	F

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy

Laptops are welcome during class for note taking but not for other purposes. If you choose to use your laptop to take notes, you must email me a copy of your notes at the end of each class session.

If I determine or suspect that you are using your laptop for some purpose other than note taking, I will first discuss my concerns with you outside of class. If the misuse continues, I will cut your participation grade in HALF. Cell phone use is never permitted during class time.

Late Work Policy

All assignments for RELI 342 are to be handed in on the due date identified in the syllabus. Late submissions, without my prior approval, will receive an appropriate point reduction. However, if you talk to me in advance of the due date and have a compelling

reason, I am usually lenient and willing to grant an extension. The important thing is that you talk to me first, not on the due date or after the fact.

Attendance Policy

If you will be absent, please email me in advance of class. An excused absence due to illness requires a note from the Engle Center or other healthcare provider. You are allowed one (1) unexcused absence without a grade reduction. Additional unexcused absences will result in a participation grade deduction of two points per class missed.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Any student whose disability falls within ADA guidelines should inform the instructor at the beginning of the semester of any special accommodations or equipment needs necessary to complete the requirements for this course. Students must register documentation with the Office of Disability Services (Murray Library). If you have questions, call extension 5382.

Closing Thoughts

If you have questions about class, come see me during office hours, email me at dcthomas@messiah.edu, or call me at ext. 5235. Emergencies should be relayed to me via email; please note that I do not check my email between 10 p.m. and 8 a.m.

Schedule (Subject to Change)

<u>Day</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Text(s)</u>
W	Sept 4	Introduction to the Course	
F	Sept 6	What is Religious Pluralism?	
<u>Part 1: "Religious Freedom" in Early American History</u>			
M	Sept 9	The Value of Civic Myths	
W	Sept 11	The Dangers of Civic Myths DUE: Response Paper #1	
F	Sept 13	The Myth of American Religious Freedom	Sehat, intro (CP)
M	Sept 16	Christian History and Religious Freedom	Augustine, "The Correction of the Donatists" (CP)
W	Sept 18	The Puritans: Who Were They and Why Do They Matter?	Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity" (C)

F	Sept 20	The Puritans and Religious Freedom	
M	Sept 23	Religious Establishments: Pro & Con DUE: Response Paper #2	Henry, "Bill Establishing..." (CP) Madison, "Memorial and Remonstrance" (CP)
W	Sept 25	Religion and the Constitution	Fea, "A 'Godless Constitution'?" (CP)
F	Sept 27	The Moral Establishment	
M	Sept 30	The Moral Establishment DUE: Response Paper #3	Beecher, "A Reformation of Morals" (CP)
W	Oct 2	EXAM #1	
F	Oct 4	Discuss the Unessay Assignment	
<u>Part 2: Religious Insiders, Religious Outsiders, and the Protestant Moral Establishment</u>			
M	Oct 7	Protestants vs. Catholics	Monk, <i>Awful Disclosures...</i> (CP)
W	Oct 9	Protestants vs. Mormons DUE: Response Paper #4	Introduction to the Book of Mormon (CP) 3 Nephi 11-13 (CP)
F	Oct 11	NO CLASS—Fall Break	
M	Oct 14	Protestants vs. Mormons	"Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo" (CP) "Testing 1... 2... 3..." (Canvas)
W	Oct 16	Protestants AND Mormons? DUE: Response Paper #5	Mouw (all)

F	Oct 18	Conflicts with the Moral Establishment	"Footloose" (Canvas) "I Conscientiously Object" (Canvas)
M	Oct 21	Conflicts with the Moral Establishment	
W	Oct 23	Islam in America	TBD
F	Oct 25	Islam and Religious Toleration	TBD
M	Oct 28	Wither the Moral Establishment?: Religious Pluralism and Public Schools DUE: Response Paper #6	"Supreme Court Decision: Engel vs. Vitale" (CP)
W	Oct 30	Wither the Moral Establishment?: The Civil Rights Movements	Clergymen of Alabama, "A Plea for Unity" (CP) King, "A Letter from Birmingham Jail" (CP)
F	Nov 1	NO CLASS MEETING	Schedule 10-minute meeting with me to discuss your unessay
M	Nov 4	Wither the Moral Establishment? DUE: Unessay assignment topic	TBD
W	Nov 6	Evangelicals and the New Moral Establishment <u>Guest Speaker:</u> John Fea, Professor of History, Messiah College	Fea, intro and chs. 1-2
F	Nov 8	Evangelicals and the New Moral Establishment DUE: Response Paper #7	Fea, chs. 3-4
M	Nov 11	Evangelicals and the New Moral Establishment	Fea, ch. 5 and conclusion

W	Nov 13	EXAM #2	
F	Nov 15	The Color of Compromise DUE: Response Paper #8	Tisby, preface & ch. 1
M	Nov 18	Race and Religion in Colonial America	Tisby, chs. 2-3
W	Nov 20	Race and Religion Before and After the Civil War	Tisby, chs. 4-7
F	Nov 22	From Civil Rights to Black Lives Matter	Tisby 8-10
M	Nov 25	NO CLASS—Prof Away at Conference DUE: Unessay assignment annotated bibliography	
W	Nov 27	NO CLASS—Thanksgiving Break	
F	Nov 29	NO CLASS—Thanksgiving Break	
<u>Part 3: American Religious Pluralism in the 21st Century</u>			
M	Dec 2	Slicing Up the Pie of American Religion in the 21 st Century DUE: Response Paper #9	“The Changing Religious Composition of the U.S.” (CP)
W	Dec 4	The Rising Tide of Nones: Some Theories	
F	Dec 6	Who Are the Nones, and What Are They Like?	Drescher, “Being None” (CP)
M	Dec 9	Is Religion Good for America?	Putnam and Campbell, “Religion and Good Neighborliness” (CP)
W	Dec 11	EXAM #3	

F	Dec 13	In-Class Unessay Presentations DUE: Unessays	
M	Dec 16	In-Class Unessay Presentations FINAL EXAM PERIOD: 8:00-10:00 a.m.	

Appendix A:
List of Response Paper Prompts

Due Date	Response Paper Prompt
Sept 11	Why did Lisa Simpson choose to perpetuate the civic myth of Jebediah Springfield at the end of “Lisa the Iconoclast”? In your opinion, did she make the right decision? Why or why not?
Sept 23	Whose argument do you find more compelling: Patrick Henry or James Madison? Why?
Sept 30	Compare and contrast Lyman Beecher’s argument in “A Reformation of Morals” with St. Augustine’s argument in “The Correction of the Donatists.” How are the arguments similar? How are they different?
Oct 9	Imagine yourself as a nineteenth-century American Protestant at the time of the original publication of the Book of Mormon. How might you react, as someone living amid the so-called “Moral Establishment,” to this text?
Oct 16	Write a review of Mouw’s book <i>Talking with Mormons</i> . Your review should include a <u>brief</u> summary of its main arguments and an evaluation of the arguments’ strengths and weaknesses. What did you find compelling, and what did you find weak, frustrating, or confusing? Overall, what is the value of <i>Talking with Mormons</i> , and who should read this book?
Oct 28	How did the Supreme Court decision in <i>Engel vs. Vitale</i> deliver a blow to the Moral Establishment? How did it uphold or even extend the Moral Establishment?

Nov 8	To what extent do white evangelicals' desire to "Make America Great Again" reflect anxieties about religious and racial pluralism in twenty-first century America? To what extent does their support for Trump evidence an effort to create a "new moral establishment," to borrow the language of David Sehat? Explain your answers to these questions by drawing on the chapters you've read from Fea's <i>Believe Me</i> .
Nov 15	The historian Jemar Tisby opens his book <i>The Color of Compromise</i> with a provocative thesis claim: "Historically speaking, when faced with the choice between racism and equality, the American church has tended to practice a complicit Christianity rather than a courageous Christianity. They chose comfort over constructive conflict and in doing so created and maintained a status quo of injustice" (17). How do you respond to Tisby's claim? Why do you agree or disagree? Provide evidence and/or examples to support your reasoning.
Dec 6	What struck you as surprising about Pew's analysis of America's religious composition? Why?
Dec 11	Is religion a force for good or for bad in American civic life? Why? Base your answers not only on today's reading from Putnam and Campbell, but by the entirety of our study this semester.