Course Description

The focus of this seminar is on religion as a cultural technique of both subjugation and liberation. From the colonial era to the present, religious beliefs and practices—Christianity in particular—have been used by powerful groups to dominate the masses. But those same beliefs and practices have often been reworked by the oppressed as tools of liberation.

Over the next twelve weeks, you will embark on a journey of self-exploration and historical inquiry. We will study the past to throw light on the present, while using our present moment to ask new questions of the historical record. Together, we will read important primary and secondary sources, from foundational documents of the conquest of the Americas to award-winning historical-theological scholarly books. You will write four three-page papers, maintain a newspaper diary, post on our discussion board, and present one set of readings to the class.

This is a fully online course with a mix of required synchronous and asynchronous components. My advice is that you check the course website on Quercus several times a week and follow the following schedule:

- Monday - Tuesday: complete the assigned readings and take notes.
- Wednesday - Thursday: complete the asynchronous activities and assignments.
- Friday: review the readings, your notes, and participate in our synchronous class meetings from 1-3pm.

If you find the material confusing, or if you would like to try out an idea for class discussion, feel free to visit me during virtual office hours, or by appointment.

Class Meetings

Our online synchronous meetings will take place on Fridays, 1-3pm, on Zoom:
Join our Zoom Meeting: https://utoronto.zoom.us/j/98940976639
Meeting ID: 989 4097 6639
Passcode: 301677
Learn how to use Zoom at UTM.
Learning Objectives

1. Analyze significant trends or transformations in the history of religious practices in Latin America using primary and secondary sources.
2. Apply the concept of “anthropotechnics,” cultural practices that are refined over time, to explain the ways that religious beliefs and practices have served (a) to subjugate populations and (b) to inspire liberatory movements.
3. Critically interpret contemporary religious movements in Latin America and explain their historical genesis using primary and secondary source material.
4. Examine the ways that religion has worked in your own life. Trace its historical development and how it reached you: key texts? important objects? sacraments? practices? holidays? family events? a special place in your community for members of this faith community to gather?

Required Texts

I have worked with the UTM Library to make all of the assigned reading material available to you digitally. In the “Course Schedule” section below, you will find hyperlinks to the readings.

This is a fourth-year seminar, so you’ll need to put in a fair amount of work reading and thinking critically about what you read. Have the assigned texts on hand during our synchronous meetings.

Explicitly engage with these texts during our discussions of them (for example, “when the author says X on p. 48, I wondered about the evidence used to support that claim”).

Accessibility, Inclusion, and the Academic Skills Centre

“Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or Accessibility Services as soon as possible. Accessibility staff (located in Room 2037, Davis Building) are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations. Please call 905-569-4699 or email access.utm@utoronto.ca. The sooner you let us know your needs the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.”

“The Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre (RGASC) is located in Room 3251 on the third floor of the Maanjiwe nendamowinan Building. The RGASC offers individual consultations, workshops (many CCR-accredited), and a wide range of programs to help students identify and develop the academic skills they need for success in their studies. Visit the RGASC website to explore their online resources, book a face-to-face or online appointment, or learn about other programming such as Writing Retreats, the Program for Accessing Research Training (PART), drop-in hours for Mathematics, Writing, and Study Skills, and dedicated resources for English Language Learners.”
Module 1 -- Introduction: How has religion worked in your life?

WEEK 1 — SEPTEMBER 11
Read
• Syllabus

Watch
• Jane the Virgin, Chapter 51, “Jane the Virgin, the Guilty Catholic.”

Do
• Complete this MS Forms survey.
• EXTRA CREDIT (2 points): Post a one-minute video introducing yourself to me and to the other participants in this seminar.

Module 2 – Anthropotechnics

WEEK 2 — SEPTEMBER 18
Read
• Peter Sloterdijk, You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics, pp. 298-311.
• Primary Source Document: “God is Dead. So is the office. These people want to save both.” New York Times, August 30, 2020. If you hit a paywall, then use our Library version of the article without images.

Discussion Board Post
• Pluck out one quote from pp. 1-15 and one quote from pp. 298-311 and write two or three sentences explaining what they mean.

Assignment
• Three-page essay #1
  • Reflect on the role of religion in your life.

Module 3 – Religion as Technique of Subjugation or Liberation

WEEK 3 — SEPTEMBER 25
*Presentations by Viktor Vucic and Marell Tomeh
* No in-person class this week. Meet with your presentation partner to plan. You are required to submit a discussion board post + a self-assessment of your post. *

Read

- Primary Source Document: *Inter caetera divina* (1493)
- Primary Source Document: *Requerimiento* (1513). Or, access it here, pp. 21-22.
- Primary Source Document: Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Short Account* (1542)

Watch

- *Juana Inés*

Required Discussion Board Post

- Using the three assigned texts and television show, Juana Inés, identify ways that religion worked as a force of subjugation.
- Self-assessment. For this discussion board post, you will assess your own performance.

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**Module 4 -- Religion as a Technique of Liberation**

**WEEK 4 — OCTOBER 2**

*Presentations by Avery Balancio and Kun Chen*

Read

  - Students can download the entire book. If you have trouble accessing the book, check out this video:

Discussion Board Post

- Drawing on what you’ve read so far in Whelan, de la Cadena, and Berger, list different ways that religion has served as a technique of liberation. Be specific about two things: what particular “technique” is being used to expand freedom and equality and in what historical context.

**WEEK 5 — OCTOBER 9**

*Presentations by Carilee Bryan and Mohamad Abshir*

Read

Discussion Board Post

- Drawing on what you’ve read so far in Whelan, de la Cadena, and Berger, list different ways that religion has served as a technique of liberation. Be specific about two things: what particular “technique” is being used to expand freedom and equality and in what historical context.

Newspaper Diary #1 Due

- Find an article on a contemporary religious struggle from a newspaper and comment on the connections to the themes in this course.
  - NOTE: this article must document how religion continues to serve as a technique of liberation.

READING WEEK — OCTOBER 12-16

WEEK 6 — OCTOBER 23  
*Presentations by Joseph Mckee and Karina Amaral

Read

- Primary Source: Oscar Romero, “Fourth Pastoral Letter: The Church’s Mission amid the National Crisis.”

Discussion Board Post

- Drawing on what you’ve read so far in Whelan, de la Cadena, and Berger, list different ways that religion has served as a technique of liberation. Be specific about two things: what particular “technique” is being used to expand freedom and equality and in what historical context.

WEEK 7 — OCTOBER 30  
*Presentations by Narisse D'Abreau

Read


Assignment

- Three-page essay on how oppressed groups have used Christianity as a technique of liberation.
- For this assignment, you will assess your own performance. I will factor your self-assessment into your grade on the essay.
Module 5 -- Religion as a Technique of Domination

WEEK 8 — NOVEMBER 6  *

Read

  • If you have trouble accessing the book, check out this video.
• Primary Source Documents: Religions of the African Diaspora, from Latin American Religions: Histories and Documents in Context, edited by Anna L. Peterson, and Manuel A. Vasquez, pp. 89-100. "To read from this book, you will need to “Check it Out” online through Hathi Trust, using your UofT login.

Discussion Board Post

• Drawing on what you’ve read so far in Silverblatt and Jennings, list different ways that religion has served as a technique of domination. Be specific about two things: what particular “technique” is being used to reduce freedom and equality and in what historical context.

WEEK 9 — NOVEMBER 13  *

Read

• Federico Finchelstein, “A 'Christianized Fascism’” and “Debating Global Totalitarianism.”
• Primary Source Documents: Independence and Modernity, from Latin American Religions: Histories and Documents in Context, edited by Anna L. Peterson, and Manuel A. Vasquez, pp. 127-142. "To read from this book, you will need to “Check it Out” online through Hathi Trust, using your UofT login.

Watch

• Interview with Federico Finchelstein.

Discussion Board Post

• Drawing on what you’ve read — in Jennings and Finchelstein — list different ways that religion has served as a technique of domination. Be specific about two things: what particular “technique” is being used to reduce freedom and equality and in what historical context.

Newspaper Diary #2 Due

• Find an article on a contemporary religious struggle from a newspaper and comment on the connections to the themes in this course.
  • NOTE: this article must document how religion continues to serve as a technique of subjugation.

WEEK 10 — NOVEMBER 20  *

Read
Read
  • Federico Finchelstein, *A Brief History of Fascist Lies*, “Introduction” and “Lies.”
  • Primary Source Documents: Protestantism in Latin America, from *Latin American Religions: Histories and Documents in Context*, edited by Anna L. Peterson, and Manuel A. Vasquez, pp. 159-170.

Discussion Board Post
  • Drawing on what you’ve read — in Jennings, Grandin, and Finchelstein — list different ways that religion has served as a technique of domination. Be specific about two things: what particular “technique” is being used to reduce freedom and equality and in what historical context.

WEEK 11 — NOVEMBER 27
Assignment
  • Three-page essay on how powerful groups have used Christianity to maintain their dominance over large populations.
  • Watch: *Even the Rain* (2010).

Module 6 – Bringing it all together – Analysis of Two Cases

WEEK 12 — DECEMBER 4
Read
  • ’Satan, be gone!’: Bolivian Christians claim credit for ousting Evo Morales
  • Primary Source: Pope Francis. *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*.

Watch
  • *The Two Popes*.

Assignment
  • Final reflection — Reconnect with your own experience of religion. In light of what we’ve examined in this course, reflect on how religion has functioned as both a technique of domination and liberation in your own life.
    • You are required to find two quotes, from the texts we’ve read over the past semester, that refute your perspective.
    • Find three examples from the readings and movies that are relevant to your own experience of religion as a technique of domination or liberation.
Assessments and Grading

Over the course of the semester, each of you will create the following:

**Four Short Essays (60 points)**
- Three-page paper #1 — This paper is worth 10 points. *Due September 18*
  - Reflect on the role of religion in your life.
- Three-page paper #2 — This paper is worth 20 points. *Due October 30*
  - How have oppressed groups have used Christianity as a technique of liberation?
- Three-page paper #3 — This paper is worth 20 points. *Due November 27*
  - How has Christianity served as a technique that powerful groups have used to maintain their dominance over large populations?
- Three-page paper #4 — This paper is worth 10 points. *Due December 4*
  - Reconnect with your own experience. In light of what we’ve examined in this course, reflect on how religion has functioned as both a technique of domination and liberation in your own life.

*NOTE: As an alternative to writing a short essay, you can submit a twelve-minute video presentation. If you would like this alternative assessment, please notify me in advance by email. Describe how you will create your video.*

**Discussion Board Posts (10 points)**
- Submit 5 posts of about 150 words/each over the course of the semester.
  - Opportunities to post on September 18, September 25, etc.

*NOTE: As an alternative to discussion board posts, you can record a two-minute podcast response to the readings. Upload your podcast to the discussion board as a media file.*

**Team Video Presentation of the Readings (20 points)**
- Sign up to present the readings for one week. Together with your partner, you will create a six-minute video presentation explaining the crucial arguments and evidence presented in the assigned readings for that week. Your presentation should be structured in the following way:
  - 1 minute: Joint overview of the assigned readings
  - 2 minutes: Presenter 1 analyzes one reading or set of readings, depending upon the week
  - 2 minutes: Presenter 2 analyzes one reading or set of readings, depending upon the week
  - 1 minute: Joint summary of the assigned readings.
- Discuss with your partner who will analyze which reading.
- Read the assigned text carefully. Take notes.
- Create three or four presentation slides on Powerpoint, Keynote, Prezi.
- Record your voice as you move through the slides.
- Your team presentation must be uploaded to Quercus **before** Thursday, 12noon, of the week in which we will be discussing your readings.
- You will assess your contributions to this presentation.
Newspaper Diary (4 points)

• Find two articles on contemporary religious struggles from newspapers and comment on their connections to the themes in this course.
  • NOTE: One article must document how religion continues to serve as a technique of subjugation, and one must document how religions continues to serve as a technique of liberation.

Self-Assessments (6 points)

• For the following assignments, you will assess your own performance:
  • Three-page paper #2. Due October 30.
  • Discussion board post. Due September 25.
  • Your video presentation. Due with your video presentation.

Policy on Missed Work or Late Assignments

This is a fourth-year course that meets once a week and is driven by class discussion. So students must come to our virtual class meetings on time and having read and thought about the assigned material. Attendance is necessary for success in this class. Students are required to declare their absence on ROSI in order to receive academic accommodation for any missed coursework. Students are allowed one excused absence over the course of the semester. Five percentage points will be deducted for each additional absence.

Out of fairness to those who turn their work in on time, late papers will be penalized by 2 points per day.

If you have missed a term test/quiz/in-class assignment or will be submitting an assignment after the due date, due to extenuating circumstances, please review the policy on our web site and follow the instructions to submit a request directly to the Department: Special Consideration. Alternatively, you may wish to submit a request to your professor directly. Please note, your request must be submitted to EITHER the professor OR the Department, not both.

Equity and Academic Rights

“The University of Toronto is committed to equity and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect. As a course instructor, I will neither condone nor tolerate behaviour that undermines the dignity or self-esteem of any individual in this course and wish to be alerted to any attempt to create an intimidating or hostile environment. It is our collective responsibility to create a space that is inclusive and welcomes discussion. Discrimination, harassment and hate speech will not be tolerated. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns you may contact the UTM Equity & Diversity Office at edo.utm@utoronto.ca.”

Accomodations for Religious Observances

“It is the policy of the University of Toronto to arrange reasonable accommodation of the needs of students who observe religious holy days other than those already accommodated by ordinary scheduling and statutory
holidays.

As a student at the University of Toronto, you are part of a diverse community that welcomes and includes students, staff, and faculty from a wide range of backgrounds, cultural traditions, and spiritual beliefs. For my part, I will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling tests, examinations, or other compulsory activities on religious holy days not captured by statutory holidays. Further to University Policy, if you anticipate being absent from class or missing a major course activity (like a test, or in-class assignment) due to a religious observance, please let me know as early in the course as possible, and with sufficient notice (a minimum of three weeks is recommended), so that we can work together to make alternate arrangements.”

Fostering Academic Integrity

“Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to Turnitin.com for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site.”

With regard to remote learning and online courses, UTM wishes to remind students that they are expected to adhere to the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters regardless of the course delivery method. By offering students the opportunity to learn remotely, UTM expects that students will maintain the same academic honesty and integrity that they would in a classroom setting.

Potential academic offences in a digital context include, but are not limited to:

1. Accessing unauthorized resources (search engines, chat rooms, Reddit, etc.) for assessments.
2. Using technological aids (e.g. software) beyond what is listed as permitted in an assessment.
3. Posting test, essay, or exam questions to message boards or social media.
4. Creating, accessing, and sharing assessment questions and answers in virtual “course groups.”
5. Working collaboratively, in-person or online, with others on assessments that are expected to be completed individually.

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, you are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from your instructor or from other institutional resources.”

Intellectual Property of the Instructor and Others

“Please be advised that the intellectual property rights in the material referred to on this syllabus and posted on the course site may belong to the course instructor or other persons. You are not authorized to reproduce or distribute such material, in any form or medium, without the prior consent of the intellectual property owner. Violation of intellectual property rights may be a violation of the law and University of Toronto policies and may entail significant repercussions for the person found to have engaged in such act. If you have any questions regarding your right to use the material in a manner other than as set forth in the syllabus, please speak to your instructor.”