

**RELIGION 351: CHURCH HISTORY STUDIES --  
RELIGION AMONG AMERICAN MINORITIES**

**Instructor: Patricia O'Connell Killen, Ph.D.**

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<b>Office Hours:</b> Mondays 3:00pm - 4:00pm; Wednesdays, 1:30pm - 3:30pm; Fridays, 9:30am-10:30am; and by appointment.		
<b>Class Time:</b> MW 6:00pm - 8:00pm	<b>Location:</b> Administration 216	

**RATIONALE: Why bother with the study of religion?**

Whether you count yourself a member of an organized religion, consider yourself to be religious in your own personal and individualized way, find religion irrelevant in your life, or consider religion a harmful force in society, you encounter religious ideas, customs, and motivations daily. Why? Because you come from and live in societies that have been deeply influenced by religious images, ideas, and values that are no less real and influential for many people not being conscious of them. Do you recognize religion and its influences when you encounter it? Are you aware of your part in it? Do you understand it?

Religious impulses and religious traditions are powerful historical forces that, from the beginning of human history, have shaped profoundly how people perceive their lives and the world in which they live. Recognizing the importance of religion and its influence socially and culturally throughout human history, PLU includes religion courses as part of its liberal arts core curriculum. While you have chosen a particular course in one subfield of religion, namely church history, this course and all courses in religion at PLU are part of the liberal arts core. With regard to religion, liberally educated persons, ideally all PLU graduates, can: 1) *articulate their own religious vision and convictions*; 2) *describe and understand empathetically religious visions, convictions, and communities different from their own*; 3) *have basic understanding of how religious ideas, groups, and movements fit into the larger scheme of social and cultural life*; 4) *engage in civil and constructive conversation with people who hold beliefs different from their own around matters in which all parties are invested*; and, 5) *understand and can practice the critical study of religion and can articulate how it differs from faith, personal opinion, dogmatism, or magic*. Liberally educated adults value these abilities and choose to exercise them in their personal, familial, work, civic and public lives

We live in a culturally and religiously pluralistic nation and world. We live in a time when politics, economics, cultures, knowledge, and human beings are changing rapidly and in ways never before imagined. In this context, the world needs liberally educated persons who understand religion and how it works in the lives of human beings. Such increased knowledge and perceptiveness lead to more effective and wise interaction and decision making in all settings. This is not a luxury, it is a requirement for the maintenance of civil society in the United States and the world.

**DESCRIPTION: What is the topic and focus of this course?**

This course explores the religious experience of people who are ethnic/cultural minorities in the United States. Because the course falls under line two in the religion department curriculum, it focuses primarily on Christianity in these communities. For this semester, the two groups that will be the focus of attention are African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans in what is today's United States. The course

examines the influence Christianity has had on these groups; how they have incorporated Christianity into their cultures; how their existence as minorities has shaped the way they express their Christianity; and, how their Christianity has aided them in surviving in a society where, historically, they have been considered “other,” a category that leads to hostility, romanticization, and stereotype. The course will elaborate how minorities have used a hermeneutic (interpretive strategy) of suspicion and a hermeneutic of retrieval in relation to Christianity in order to tap the vitality of that heritage even as they criticized its use to justify their oppression.

More generally, in the course we will theorize about how religion influences the ability of individuals and groups to live and work in situations of ethnic, cultural, economic, and religious pluralism. How does religion influence racial attitudes and practices? What role does religion play in supporting ethnic and cultural minorities to overcome socio-economic barriers? How does religion provide identity, integrity, and courage for oppressed and oppressing groups? How does religion contribute to the justification of political, economic, racial, gender, and other cultural arrangements of power, status, and meaning in the United States?

**GOALS: What are the learning outcomes for this course?**

**Foundational goal:** that participants leave the course with a critical and complex appreciation of religion as a dimension of individual and corporate life, especially in the experience of ethnic/cultural minority communities.

**Specific Goals:**

By the end of the course participants should be able to:

- 1) Describe critically and empathetically major elements and events in the religious and cultural life of the African-American and Hispanic-American communities in the United States.
- 2) Articulate in a critical, nuanced, and theoretically informed manner how religion intersects with other dimensions of cultural and social life.
- 3) Identify and explain three ways that religious identity and commitment increase and inhibit individuals' and groups' abilities to live in a diverse and pluralistic society.
- 4) Read a text critically and place the text in its larger cultural, conversational context; identify and accurately summarize the argument of the text, the assumptions behind the argument, and the implications of the argument; and, locate one's own position and assumptions in relation to those of the text.
- 5) Research and write an academic paper on a topic related to religion in the lives of cultural and ethnic minorities and do so in a form and with content that meet the standards for critical humanistic scholarship in an upper-division, university course in church history.

**TEXTS:**

Orlando O. Espin. *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism*. NY: Orbis, 1997.

Diana L. Hayes. *Hagar's Daughters: Womanist Ways of Being in the World*. NY: Paulist, 1995.

Dwight N. Hopkins. *Down, Up, and Over: Slave Religion and Black Theology*. Minneapolis, MN: 2000.

Jeanette Rodriguez. *Our Lady of Guadalupe*. Austin, TX: University of Texas, 1994.

Richard Rodriguez. *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez; An Autobiography*. NY: Bantam, 1982.

Gayraud S. Wilmore. *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*. 3rd edition. NY: Orbis, 2000.

**COURSE STRATEGIES:**

This course will operate as an upper-division seminar. Small-group and large-group discussion,

individual presentations, lectures on background material, presentations from outside resource persons, possible field trips, homework, library research, writing, reading, and films are some of the strategies that will be used.

## **REQUIREMENTS/EVALUATION/EXPECTATIONS:**

### **Norms and Expectations**

- 1) Practice civility and scholarly charity in all conversations.
- 2) Act and speak in ways that respect the persons involved in all discussions, even when positions are put forth that you find in error or reprehensible.
- 3) Co-curricular activities or requirements for other courses do not constitute excused absences for this course. (This includes juries for music, irregularly scheduled finals for nursing courses, sports, etc.)
- 4) You are responsible to get notes and handouts from your peers for any missed class.
- 5) I keep my office hours and make appointments to meet at other times, if real constraints keep you from being able to meet during regularly scheduled office hours.
- 6) I will support your learning by teaching responsibly the scholarship of the field, creating a challenging and supportive learning environment, and maintaining standards of academic excellence.
- 6) No late homework will be accepted.
- 7) The University's policy on academic honesty will be strictly enforced in this course. **Plagiarism, cheating, and stealing or defacement of library materials will result in automatic failure for the course.**
- 8) Presence and active, informed participation in class are expectations of this course.

### **Evaluation for Course Grade**

- 1) Quality of participation in class sessions. This includes coming to class prepared by having read and thought about the assigned material for the day; responsibly fulfilling any homework assigned to assist in preparing for class; contributing constructively to discussions and tasks in small and large groups; acting at all times in ways that contribute to your own learning and the learning of others in the class. To put this briefly, participants should exhibit behavior congruent with standards of academic honesty, integrity, and productivity appropriate to a university community. (Expect me to consider more than one absence a problem.) (20%)
- 2) Unit 1 Exam. (25%)
- 3) Unit 2 Exam. (25%)
- 4) Seminar project presentation and paper. Topic must be approved by the instructor. The project may focus on a person, event, idea, or community. Projects are not limited to the two communities studied. Other possibilities include Asian Americans, Pacific Island Peoples, Native Americans, East Indians, religious and ethnic communities from Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean. Whatever the focus, the project must involve religion in the life of an ethnic/cultural minority group and must employ theoretical concepts from the course in its analysis. The project must employ both primary and secondary sources. The latter must include print sources from libraries and may include web-based sources. The project will involve a class presentation and a formal academic paper of 12-14 double-spaced, typed pages, excluding endnotes and bibliography. (Presentation 5%; paper 25%)

### **Standards for Work in an Upper-Division Church History Course—Discussions, Exams, Project Presentations, and Papers**

This is an upper-division, university course in church history. Education involves learning, internalizing, and being able to apply disciplinary standards of excellence to one's own work. Excellent academic work in

church history, which is part of the humanities, is characterized by the following qualities:

1. Accurate, empathetic, judicious understanding of the content of all resources. This standard's sometimes is summarized with the term **scholarly charity**. Scholarly charity requires that someone engaged in academic conversation or writing always present the source being discussed in its best light and demonstrate empathetic understanding of it before they move on to criticize it. You should be able to describe and discuss precisely and accurately what an author has written or a speaker has said or a film has presented. Evaluation, response, and critique are appropriate only after having accurately represented another's ideas. The privilege of criticizing a viewpoint is earned by showing that you really understand it.

2. Clear, critical, analytic thinking that supports an interpretive claim (thesis) with specific evidence. Always use the most precise historical, empirical, or contemporary data you can find to support the claims of your paragraph or a paper's or presentation's thesis. Conclusions should follow from and be supported by evidence. Be sure that your evidence is relevant, accurate, and detailed. Show the logical relationships among ideas. This helps a reader or listener to follow your thinking.

3. Creativity that moves beyond reporting someone else's ideas. Excellent academic work contains "news," which might be a question, analysis, creative application, sustained critique, development, or response to some material. "News" is something not obvious to a reader or student of the material at hand. You might see a connection between two or more ideas. You might have a unique perspective that sheds new insight into material. Correctly repeating what is read or discussed constitutes the minimal requirement for academic work. (This is called reporting.) Excellent work moves beyond repetition to unique insights, organization, correlations, and interpretive claims. Work to find your own voice and become part of the scholarly conversation.

4. Proper use of English and technical forms for writing and presentation. Excellent written work evidences proofreading and good communication. Excellent oral presentations also demonstrate careful expression. An important thesis or subpoint can be lost in a paper or project that is badly written or presented. Readers and listeners have not been in your brain with you while you figured out what you wanted to say. Help your readers and listeners by speaking and writing well. Don't require your audience to guess what you mean.

5. Further specifications of standards for work for this course:

a) Exams and course project are expected to present an historical argument. Hence, the following *are not appropriate or acceptable*: (1) Reports: a report summarizes information on a topic; or, (2) Confessions of faith or statements of one's personal positions (opinions). Believing or thinking what you believe or think is your right. Confessions or positions statements, however, do not constitute critical historical scholarship and so do not meet the requirements for this course. Personal experience or positions may be appropriate as evidence in a particular project, but must be treated in the same way as other evidence.

b) A well constructed historical argument in an exam or a project paper presents a significant interpretive claim or thesis that has been developed from having explored a question, problem, theme, issue, situation, etc. It demonstrates critical reading of source material that presents its content accurately, fairly, and insightfully; shows awareness of the question or problem the material seeks to address and how it approaches the task; considers assumptions behind and implications of the material; and, identifies clearly how the source's information connects to the paper's question. The argument is organized coherently and employs pertinent particular information in ways that support the main claims and secondary claims of the paper. The argument is constructed in a way that exhibits scholarly charity. It never belittles a text, idea, event, or situation, ascribes malicious intent to anything without solid evidence, judges before first working to understand, and avoids reductionism. Finally, it is well written and uses appropriate scholarly apparatus.

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO NOTE:**

1. This course fulfills line 2 of the General University Requirement in Religion. If you have taken another line 2 course, you may take this course as an elective but not to fulfill your GUR religion requirement.
2. This course fulfills the alternate perspectives line of the GUR Perspectives on Diversity requirement.
3. *If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible. No accommodations for learning disabilities will be made without official notification from the Office of Counseling and Testing.*
4. **Last day to add a course or to drop a course with full refund is September 22.**
5. **Last day to file pass/fail forms for a course is November 3.**
6. *Last day to withdraw from a course, Wednesday, November 22.*

**COURSE CALENDAR:**

*This calendar is subject to revision at the instructor's discretion. Homework will be assigned throughout the semester. Homework is due at the beginning of the class session. Reading is due on the day for which it is assigned. ALWAYS HAVE THE READING WITH YOU IN CLASS.*

9/11: Introduction to the Course—Topic, Format, Instructor, Participants

**UNIT 1: AFRICAN-AMERICAN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN THE U.S.**

9/13: *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (Henceforth BRBR) vii-xv, 1-15.

**Homework:** a) one-page precis of the argument of chapter 2; OR, b) one-page schematic concept map of the argument of chapter two with the chapter's thesis noted

9/18: BRBR, 52-98

9/20: BRBR, 99-162

9/25: BRBR, 163-221

9/27: Library Instruction—meet in library classroom in basement of Mortvedt

**Assignment:** Bring topic ideas for course project

10/2: BRBR, 222-281

10/4: *Hagar's Daughters*, 1-67

10/9: *Down, Up, and Over* (Henceforth DUO), Introduction and chapter 1

**Guest:** Gary McNeil, organizer for Industrial Areas Foundation to describe meeting in inner-city Seattle that is course field trip

10/11: DUO, chapter 2, 3

**DUE:** Course project proposal

10/16: DUO, chapters 4, 5

10/18: **Phone Seminar with Diana Hayes, author of *Hagar's Daughters***

10/23: Field Trip to community organizing meeting in central district. Seattle

10/25: DUO, chapter 6

10/30: Review and Distribution of Exam 1 questions

11/1: Exam work session

**UNIT 2: HISPANIC AMERICAN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN THE U.S.**

11/6: *Hunger of Memory*, 1-73

11/8: **Phone seminar with Dwight Hopkins, author of *Down, Up, and Over***  
*Hunger of Memory*, 77-139, 175-195

**EXAM 1 due**

11/13: *The Faith of the People* (Henceforth FP) < ix-xxi, 1-31

11/15: *FP*, 63-90, 156-179

**Guest seminar discussant, Gary McNeil, Industrial Areas Foundation**

11/20: Project workday/reading day – No Class Session

11/22: **Thanksgiving Break – University Closed**

11/27: **Presentation by Dr. Jeanette Rodriguez, author of *Our Lady of Guadalupe***  
OLG, vii-xxxiii, 1-86

**Due:** Project paper draft

11/29: OLG, 114-165

12/4: **EXAM 2**

12/6: Project Presentations

12/11: Project Presentations

12/13: Project Presentations

12/18: Project Presentations – Course Closure

**Due:** Project paper

**Mid-Semester Exam Questions**

**Directions:** This is a take-home, open-book, open-note, open-consultation with your classmates and your professor exam. Answer **ONE** of the following questions. Your answer should be no more than seven, double-spaced, typed pages in length. Quality is the goal here, not filler.

**DUE DATE AND TIME:** The exam is due in my box at Knorr House by 9:00am on Thursday, November 2. No extensions!

**Question 1:** Wilmore, Hayes, and Hopkins all emphasize the importance of Black Americans' connection to their African religious and cultural heritage in their having survived slavery and in their struggle for liberation. Describe the argument each makes for the importance to Black Americans of their African past. Discuss commonalities and divergences in those arguments.

**OR**

**Question 2:** Wilmore, Hayes, and Hopkins each argue that African American Christianity is an authentic and distinctive expression of Christianity. Describe the major points each uses to make this argument and why the argument is significant to these authors purposes.

**OR**

**Question 3:** Compare Wilmore's and Hopkins' theoretical explanations of how religion intersects with other dimensions of cultural and social life. How are the theoretical constructs of these two authors crucial to the arguments they make for the role of religion in the lives of African Americans during and after slavery? Explain whether and how you see a similar or different understanding of how religion intersects with other dimension of cultural and social life operating in Hayes.

**OR**

**Question 4:** Identify one theme or tension in Wilmore, Hayes, and Hopkins that has stimulated your thought about what religion is and how it works in the lives of individuals and society. Describe the presentation of this theme in each of the authors and explain its significance to their respective arguments. Discuss how and why it has stimulated your thinking.

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**Criteria for assessing mid-term answers:**

- 1) Accuracy in presenting material from the texts.
  - 2) Clarity and insightfulness of thinking about the question and material from the texts in relation to the question.
  - 3) Insightfulness and judiciousness of the answer's thesis (interpretive claim).
  - 4) Proper use of English and technical forms for writing.
- (For fuller specification of criteria, see syllabus.)

## EXAM 2 QUESTIONS

**DIRECTIONS:** Answer **one** of the following questions. The answer should be no more than four double-spaced typed pages, if done as a take-home. (You also have the option of writing the exam in class on the night of December 4.) The answer should have a thesis statement and develop that thesis using pertinent material from texts and presentations.

**Criteria for evaluation:** The answer will be graded against the following criteria: a) mastery and insightfulness regarding course material; b) quality of thesis statement; c) coherence of argument; d) quality of writing.

### Question Options:

1. Jeanette Rodriguez and Orlando Espin both consider popular religion central to Hispanic people's identity and their capacity to maintain dignity and resist oppression. How does each define popular religion? Describe how Our Lady of Guadalupe exemplifies popular religion in the lives of Mexican Americans.
2. Drawing on the material you have read and course presentations and discussions, imagine a conversation among Richard Rodriguez, Orlando Espin, and Jeanette Rodriguez regarding assimilation of Mexican Americans into White Anglo U.S. culture and the place of religion in that process. Identify two main points each would contribute to the conversation and why. Note similarities and differences among their positions.
3. Describe and compare the positions of Dwight Hopkins and Orlando Espin on how poverty and the commitment to liberation are integral to understanding and encountering God and living a life of Christian discipleship.
4. Summarize Jeanette Rodriguez's argument on how Our Lady of Guadalupe works in the lives of Mexican-American women. What are the similarities and differences between Rodriguez's presentation of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Diana Hayes argument about how religious and cultural symbols helped and help African-American women maintain dignity and resist oppression?