

Death and Dying: The Western Experience

Religious Studies 2N03

Term 2, Winter 2019
Tuesday & Thursday, 2:30 – 3:20 pm
Location: TBD

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Office: University Hall B121
Office Hours: TBD
TA: TBD

Materials and Fees: All readings will be accessible as .pdf files on our Avenue site, with one exception. Please purchase or borrow a copy of Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (currently \$19.00 CAD for both the Kindle and paperback versions on amazon.ca).



(Master E.S. Trost durch Abwenden vom Irdischen, ca. 1450)

Course Prerequisites: None

Course Description: Death and dying are pervasive themes in the Western religious traditions. This course will use historical, sociological and anthropological methods to explore how ideas and practices related to death and dying in the Western world have developed over time, paying attention both to broad historical trends and the particularities unique to various localized contexts. The course will centre around three themes: 1) preparing for death; 2) burying, mourning, and remembering the dead; and 3) transcending and escaping death. We will look at the specific ways these themes manifest themselves in ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary contexts. We will investigate these themes through lectures, readings, and documentary films, but also through clips from television shows, movies, music, YouTube videos, and other relevant popular media related to death and dying in our contemporary setting.

Learning Goals:

By the end of the course, students will have the ability to describe, understand, and analyze:

- foundational Western texts, traditions, and practices related to death and dying.
- scholarly accounts of the shifting conceptions of death and dying in the West.
- criticisms of the dominant, medicalized approach to death and dying in the modern West.
- the complex interplay between religion, technology, society, culture, and historical events.
- how encounters with death and dying shape individuals and communities.

Course Requirements and Evaluation of Grades:

- Tutorial attendance and participation: 10%
- Mid-term exam: 20%

- Final exam: 30%
- Writing assignment #1: 10%
- Writing assignment #2: 10%
- Writing assignment #3: 20%

Schedule:

| Date | Topic | Reading | Assignment |
|--------|--|--|---------------------------|
| 8-Jan | Introduction | No Assigned Readings | |
| 10-Jan | Foundations of the Western Approach to Death and Dying: Burial and the Afterlife in the Hebrew Bible | Matthew Suriano, <i>A History of Death in the Hebrew Bible</i> (Pages 1-36) | |
| 15-Jan | Foundations of the Western Approach to Death and Dying: The Emergence of the Final Judgment, Resurrection of the Body, and Immortality of the Soul in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition | Selections from: Daniel; 2 Maccabees; 4 Maccabees; Philo; Josephus; Matthew; Luke; 1 Corinthians; Romans; Revelation | |
| 17-Jan | Foundations of the Western Approach to Death and Dying: Body, Soul, and the Afterlife in Greek Philosophical Sources | Selections from Plato, <i>Phaedo</i> | |
| 22-Jan | Theological Mediations on Death and Dying from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period | Selections from: Gregory of Nyssa, <i>A Homily of Consolation concerning Pulcheria</i> ; Ambrose, <i>On the Death of Satyrus</i> ; John Chrysostom, <i>First Homily on 2 Corinthians</i> ; Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologica</i> ; Funeral Sermons for Martin Luther | |
| 24-Jan | <i>Ars moriendi</i> : Dying a "Good Death" from Medieval Europe to Modern America | Selections from <i>The Book of the Craft of Dying</i> Alison Beringer, "The Death of Christ as a Focus of the Fifteenth-century <i>Artes moriendi</i> " | |
| 29-Jan | <i>Ars moriendi</i> (continued) | Selections from Jeremy Taylor, <i>The Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying</i> | |
| 31-Jan | Death and the American Civil War: Dying, Burying, and Theologizing | Drew Gilpin Faust, <i>This Republic of Suffering</i> (Chapters 1, 3) | |
| 5-Feb | Death and the American Civil War (continued) | Drew Gilpin Faust, <i>This Republic of Suffering</i> (Chapters 5, 6, Epilogue) In class: Death and the Civil War (film) | Writing assignment #1 due |

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| 7-Feb | Death and Dying in the West from Modernity to Contemporary Times | Philippe Ariès, "The Reversal of Death: Changes in Attitudes toward Death in Western Societies" Leo Tolstoy, <i>The Death of Ivan Ilych</i> | Mid-term exam questions circulated |
| 12-Feb | Death and Dying in the West from Modernity to Contemporary Times (Continued) | Tony Walter, "Facing Death without Tradition" Selections from Clive Seale, <i>Constructing Death</i> Nancy Scheper-Hughes, "Death and Dying in Anxious America" | |
| 14-Feb | Anthropological Approaches to Death in the West | Ellen Badone, "Memories of Marie-Thérèse" Lawrence Taylor, "Bas InEiriin: Cultural Constructions of Death in Ireland" | Mid-term exam due |
| 19-Feb | NO CLASSES! | Enjoy your break! | |
| 21-Feb | NO CLASSES! | Enjoy your break! | |
| 26-Feb | Contemporary Issues in Death and Dying: Preparing for Death | K. Thornton and C.B. Philips, "Performing the good death: the medieval <i>Ars moriendi</i> and contemporary doctors" Farr Curlin, "Hospice and Palliative Medicine's Attempt at an Art of Dying" Lisa Priest, "When it's time to die, home is where the heart is" (<i>Globe and Mail</i>) | |
| 28-Feb | Preparing for Death (Continued) | Sandra Martin, "Fight to the death: Why Canada's physician-assisted dying debate has only just begun" (<i>The Globe and Mail</i>) Catherine Porter, "At His Own Wake: Celebrating Life and the Gift of Death" (<i>The New York Times</i>) J. Donald Boudreau, "Physician-assisted suicide poisons the mission of medicine" (<i>The Globe and Mail</i>) | |

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| 5-Mar | Contemporary Issues in Death and Dying: Remembering and Mourning the Dead | <p>Selections from Jessica Mitford, <i>The American Way of Death</i></p> <p>Thomas Lynch, "Last Rites: When the Existential Becomes the Retail"</p> <p>Selections from Caitlin Doughty, <i>Smoke Gets in Your Eyes</i></p> <p>In class: The Undertaking (film)</p> | |
| 7-Mar | Remembering and Mourning the Dead (Continued) | <p>Selections from Suzanne Kelly, <i>Greening Death: Reclaiming Burial Practices and Restoring Our Ties to the Earth</i></p> <p>Emma Reilly, "Hamilton resident pushes for green burials" (<i>The Hamilton Spectator</i>)</p> | |
| 12-Mar | Remembering and Mourning the Dead (Continued) | Selections from Katherine Ashenberg, <i>The Mourner's Dance</i> | |
| 14-Mar | Contemporary Issues in Death and Dying: Transcending and Escaping Death | <p>Larissa MacFarquhar, "The Kindest Cut: What sort of person gives a kidney to a stranger?" (<i>The New Yorker</i>)</p> <p>Arlene MacDonald, "Immortal Organs: Spirituality in the Resurrected Lives of Organ Transplant Recipients"</p> | Writing assignment #2 due |
| 19-Mar | Transcending and Escaping Death (Continued) | <p>Anna Weiner, "Only Human: Meet the hackers trying to solve the problem of death" (<i>The New Republic</i>)</p> <p>Selections from: N. Katherine Hayles, <i>How We Became Posthuman</i></p> | |
| 21-Mar | Death, Dying, and the African American Experience | <p>Crystal Feimster, "Ida B. Wells and the Lynching of Black Women" (<i>The New York Times</i>)</p> <p>Debbie Elliot, "How a Shooting Changed Charleston's Oldest Black Church" (<i>NPR</i>)</p> <p>Karla Holloway, <i>Passed On: African American Mourning Stories</i> (Chapter 2)</p> | |

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| 26-Mar | The African American Experience (Continued) | Jerry Johnson et al., "The Impact of Faith Beliefs " Karla Holloway, "Their Bodies, Our Conduct" Richard Payne, "Racially Associated Disparities in Hospice and Palliative Care Access" | |
| 28-Mar | Death, Dying, and the Indigenous Experience in Canada: Traditional Beliefs and Rituals; Interactions with Settlers and the Medical System | Paul Hackett, "Historical Mourning Practices Observed among the Cree and Ojibway" Mary Hampton, et al., "Completing the Circle: Elders speak about end-of-life care with Aboriginal families in Canada" | |
| 2-Apr | The Indigenous Experience in Canada: Residential Schools; Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women | John Ibbitson, "Missing children, unmarked burials a legacy of residential schools" (<i>Globe and Mail</i>) Selections from "Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada" Alleen Brown, "Indigenous Women Have Been Disappearing for Generations. Politicians Are Finally Starting to Notice" (<i>The Intercept</i>) | |
| 4-Apr | Introduction to the Death Positive Movement | John Leland, "The Positive Death Movement Comes to Life" (<i>The New York Times</i>) | Writing assignment #3 due |
| 9-Apr | Exam Review Session | No Assigned Readings | |

Description of Assignments:

Writing assignment #1: Students will write 2 pages on the *Ars moriendi* tradition, drawing on lectures and assigned readings. I will provide a more detailed description of this assignment both in class and on the Avenue site.

Mid-term exam: The mid-term exam will ask students to explain and analyze aspects of Drew Gilpin Faust's *This Republic of Suffering* in the context of the preceding lectures and readings on death and dying in the ancient, medieval, and early modern periods. I will give students three questions. They will choose and write answers for two of them. I will provide further details both in class and on the Avenue site.

Writing assignment #2: Students will write 2 pages on one of two topics: 1) hospice and palliative care or 2) the funeral industry and the mortuary profession. Students will situate the discussion of their topic in the context of the lectures and readings on the description and criticism of the modern approach to death and dying the West. I will provide a more detailed description of this assignment both in class and on the Avenue site.

Writing assignment #3: Students will write 4 pages on one of two topics: 1) death, dying, and the African American experience or 2) death, dying, and the indigenous experience in Canada. I will provide a more detailed description of this assignment both in class and on the Avenue site.

Final exam: The final exam will take place during the University-assigned timeslot. It will deal with lectures and readings from the entire course. I will give students four questions. They will choose and write answers for three of them. I will provide further details both in class during the review session on the last day of courses.

Policies and Resources for Support:

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous and Spiritual Observances:

McMaster University (the University) strives to be welcoming and inclusive of all its members and respectful of their differences. Students, staff, and instructors come from a range of backgrounds, traditions and beliefs. The University recognizes that, on occasion, the timing of a student's religious, Indigenous, or spiritual observances and that of their academic obligations may conflict. In such cases, the University will provide reasonable academic accommodation for students that is consistent with the Ontario *Human Rights Code*, through respectful, accessible, and fair processes.

Further information on McMaster University's commitment to an inclusive community and its legal obligations can be found on the website of the Office of Human Rights & Equity Services (HRES) at: www.hres.mcmaster.ca

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities:

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University's Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities. Student Accessibility Services may be found at: <http://sas.mcmaster.ca>.

Academic Integrity:

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Avenuetolearn.com:

In this course we will be using Avenuetolearn.com. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy:

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Late Submission of Assignments:

All reasonable requests for extensions will be considered prior to the assignment's deadline. Late assignments submitted without extension will be penalized by 5% a day. Please request extensions in advance of the deadline. Staff in the office of the Department of Religious Studies will not date-stamp or receive papers and other assignments.

McMaster Student Absence Form:

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar "Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work". Please note these regulations have changed beginning Spring/Summer 2015. The timeframe within which the MSAF is valid has been reduced from 5 days to 3 days. The upper limit for which an MSAF can be submitted has been reduced from 'less than 30%' to 'less than 25%' of the course weight. As per the policy, students must immediately follow up with their instructors to request accommodation for any missed academic work. Failure to do so may negate their relief. If you have any questions about the MSAF, please contact your Associate Dean's office.

Note on Changes in the Course:

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check her/his McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

Submission of Student Work:

All assignments should be submitted electronically to the appropriate dropbox on Avenuetolearn.com by midnight on the date the assignment is due. Do not submit assignments via email! Please review the policies on “Avenuetolearn.com” “Turnitin.com,” and “Late Submission of Assignments” included on this syllabus.

Turnitin.com:

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically to Turnitin.com and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must still submit a copy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Written Work:

All written work will be marked on grammar, clarity of writing, and organization, as well as content and analysis. Proofread and then proofread again. All work must be properly referenced, with footnotes and bibliography (where applicable). Students are encouraged to visit the Student Success Centre to improve their essay skills (Gilmour Hall 110). For information about the Writing Support Services, visit the Centre’s website: <https://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/academic-support/academicsupport/>