



Edited by Ella Boyer '21

Getting to Know Professor Liz Dolfi

Elizabeth Dolfi (Vassar College, B.A.; Yale University, M.A.R; Columbia University, M.A., M.Phil., Certificate in Women Gender and Sexuality Studies, Ph.D.) is joining us as a visiting professor with specializations on Christian traditions, American religions, and feminist and queer studies of religion and the secular. Her courses this year include RELG 242: Oh My G*d: Christianity and Sexual Revolutions (Fall); RELG 110: Understanding Religion and RELG 250: It's the End of the World: Religion, Moral Panics, and Apocalypses (Winter); RELG 232: Queer Religions and RELG 246: Christianity and Capitalism (Spring).



What is your focus within the realm of religious studies?

I am an Americanist by training, but I also have a strong background in feminist and queer studies, so I am fascinated by the ways that social constructions of gender, sexuality, and family intersect with the power structures of the American empire. I have always been particularly interested in the sociology and historical development of American evangelicalism and evangelical media publics. My current research is on gender and affect in the evangelical anti-human trafficking humanitarian movement.

Can you highlight a course you'll teach this year that excites you?

I am incredibly excited about all of the courses that I will be teaching this year, because truly, I will take any opportunity to talk about the intersection of religion with queer studies, capitalism, and popular culture – if you do not want me to talk your ear off about the relationship between land use and moral panics over pre-marital sexual contact in Puritan Massachusetts, do not strike up a conversation with me at a party!

But if I had to single out one course that I am especially looking forward to, it would be 'It's the End of the World: Apocalypses and Moral Panics.' Millennialist movements are absolutely fascinating and can tell us so much about the dynamic relationship between theology and sociality. I also think that there are deep humanistic resources in the theologies and histories that we will encounter in this course for confronting our own, profoundly unstable, historical moment of global pandemics and a warming planet. Our unit on speculative

fiction and Afrofuturism is particularly rich for thinking about social justice and imagining utopian possibilities even in moments that are characterized by loss, uncertainty, and widespread injustice.

What has been one of the most impactful academic experiences in your career?

The summer before I started my doctoral studies, I was a fellow with the Nashville Institute – a program funded by the Human Rights Campaign which brought together clergy, activists, and researchers working in religion and theology to think creatively about the intersection of queer studies and religion. That experience turned out to be incredibly intellectually formative, and it has been so encouraging to watch queer religious studies grow from a niche area of scholarly inquiry to an established and intellectually vibrant part of the field.

What did you know about Carleton prior to working here?

Leaving aside the obvious, I have a handful of good friends from the Twin Cities who have told me that the frisbee golf course “rules.”

What is your nerdiest hobby/passion?

I think it could be argued that almost all of my non-academic hobbies and passions are still deeply nerdy! I love to hike/backpack, I am a big fan of putting together IKEA furniture because it is basically adult Legos, I used to be certified to teach archery, and I could be fairly characterized as a *Ru Paul's Drag Race* superfan.

Meet Professor Caleb Hendrickson

Caleb Hendrickson (St. Olaf College, B.A.; Yale Divinity School, M.Div.; University of Virginia, Ph.D.) is a visiting Assistant Professor of Religion for the 2020-2021 academic year. Caleb specializes in modern Christian and Jewish thought. His dissertation, “Paul Tillich and Franz Rosenzweig: Picturing Revelation,” compared two prominent figures in twentieth-century religion, one Protestant and one Jewish. This year, he will teach the following courses: RELG 110: Understanding Religion and RELG 217: Faith and Doubt in the Modern Age (Fall); RELG 121: Introduction to Christianity and RELG 284 Art and Religion (Winter); RELG 274: Religion and Bioethics (Spring).

What is your focus within the realm of religious studies?



I work on topics related to art, visibility, and aesthetics in mainly modern Christian and Jewish thought. I’m interested in the power of pictures and visual metaphor in these intellectual traditions. My dissertation examined the role of pictures and visual representation in the thought of the Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig and the Lutheran theologian Paul Tillich, both German thinkers of the 1920s. How do encounters with visual art and visual culture shape religious ideas – of revelation, history, community? How do habits of viewing become habits of thinking, and vice versa? These are the kinds of questions I ask. Approaching religious thought from this visual angle is exciting to me; it allows me to bring philosophy and theology into conversation with art history and visual theory. Within the wonderfully diverse

world of religious studies, I camp out at this crossroads between image and idea.

Can you highlight a course you'll teach this year that excites you?

This winter I'll be teaching a class called "Religion and Art." The central question is a big one: do religion and art share a basis in culture? That is, do we make art for some of the same reasons — and in much the same way — that we make religion? For much of recorded history art and religion have coincided, largely around the category of ritual. Art was ritual and ritual was art. In the modern period, religion and art have gone their separate ways. They have often feuded with each other. But, surely something of their old affinity remains. Where? What continues to connect these two apparently disparate spheres of culture? What do Mecca and the MOMA, the Buddha and Basquiat have in common? The course considers how religion and art often work in parallel fashion — to orient in us time and space, generate symbolic worlds of meaning, channel the power of play, and cultivate aesthetic emotions such as resonance and wonder. I'm eager to explore these areas with students and I'm counting on them to bring fresh perspectives and guide our conversations toward new and exciting territory.

What has been one of the most impactful academic experiences in your career?

When I was an undergraduate (at another small liberal arts college in Northfield) I attended an academic conference at Syracuse University. It was part of a series of conferences convened by the philosopher of religion John Caputo, called, "Postmodernism, Culture, and Religion." It was my first, very partial, glimpse into the academic profession. There were a number of luminaries giving keynote talks and dozens of scholars and students giving papers, getting coffee, talking and debating in the halls. It was thrilling, almost intoxicating, to be there. I wasn't immediately sure that I wanted to be a part of that world, but it left me wanting more. For any student considering graduate study, I would recommend attending a conference sooner rather than later.

I hear you went to St. Olaf. How has your return to Minnesota been so far?

Yes, I am an Ole! (But I promise I won't go Um-Ya-Ya'ing around campus.) I'm also from Minneapolis. So, Minnesota is my home. I've returned to Minnesota many times since graduating from St. Olaf and leaving the area, but this time has been different. I grew up in South Minneapolis, very near the place where George Floyd was murdered. As a white Minnesotan, I have some practice in pretending that racist violence is something that happens elsewhere and that the structures of systemic racism have only shallow roots, if any, in the culture that raised me. Floyd's murder and the uprising that followed make this kind of thinking impossible. A few days ago I returned to the neighborhood where I grew up. It looks different to me now. There are fewer buildings along Lake Street. And I see it with an acute awareness that this place is far from immune to the lie of white supremacy and the violence it condones, that, to the contrary, the culture of white supremacy has made itself quite at home here. It has been painful to witness Minneapolis's pain from afar — from Charlottesville, Virginia, in fact, a place that has also seen the lethal force of white supremacy erupt very visibly on its streets. It has also been exciting to witness the power of ordinary people — my neighbors — taking action on many levels against what killed George Floyd and so many others. I'm looking forward to learning from students what they have been doing and thinking about in response to this moment in their home communities.

What is your nerdiest hobby/passion?

Besides being a scholar of religion? My coolest nerdiest passion is probably NBA basketball, which is not nerdy in itself, but can become so if one spends more time listening to niche NBA podcasts and reading esoteric basketball blogs than actually watching the games. My nerdiest nerdiest passion is probably rare and collectible books. I'm an unrepentant bibliophile. I don't have an especially impressive or valuable book collection, but if you do, I want to hear all about it. And I have a few books at home that I'd grab in a fire.

Professor Michael McNally's Newest Book

Professor Michael McNally has published his book, *Defend the Sacred: Native American Religious Freedom Beyond the First Amendment* (Princeton University Press, 2020), for which he was granted the Guggenheim Fellowship.

In previous interviews while working on this book, you mentioned the legal definition of “religion” being exclusionary to Native beliefs and claims, and that the definition of religion is “not set in stone.” How has writing this book changed or influenced the way you think about and understand religion?

I had always known the implicit legal definitions of religion, organized around predictably Protestant Christian forms of individual and subjective belief, were never up to the task of protecting Native American rights to sacred lands, or to traditional practices that are not legible as “religion” (like harvesting sacred plants and food like white rice, etc.). But Native American “religious freedom,” bankrupt as it has been in the courts, is not the end of the story. I came to learn over the course of book research with wicked smart Native American advocates, lawyers, and activists, that the language of religion and religious freedom is so rhetorically powerful in this country that strategic position with the language of the sacred has made for significant gains in Congress and in courts of public opinion. This is evident, for example, in the passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (1978) and its amendment in 1994 to protect the Peyote Way.



I also have come to appreciate the collective shape of religion. Thinking of “religion” as matters of collective duty and obligation — almost more as law than as spirituality — has made a lot more sense to me. Durkheim said religion is “eminently social” and gave his reasons; I see even more truth in that approach after this work, but I also have come to appreciate what my Jewish and Islamic Studies colleagues have been trying to tell me all these years: Western categories’ interpretation of “religion” may be closer to “law.”

Do you have any important takeaways for Religion students interested in your research?

Yes. My work shows abundantly how definitional and theoretical discussions about “religion” *really matter*. What we think counts as religion and what religion really is have very real consequences for whether a Native tradition is permitted to continue. These definitional and theoretical discussions hold weight in determining whether a sacred site is allowed to be destroyed by fracking, uranium mining, pleasure boating, or recreational skiing. This is not simply to say, like many do, that “religion” as a concept is inherently colonial and should be utterly dispensed with, but that definitions of religion are caught up in other struggles over power and inclusion.

Will this book be incorporated in or influence the classes you plan on teaching this year?

For sure. The book emerged very much from my experiences with Carleton students over the years in RELG 243 Native American Religious Freedom, which I taught last spring. The same concerns inform my RELG 130 Native American Religions class, but are also taken up in RELG 239, Religion and the American Landscape, which I'm taking out of RELG 100 to place it more squarely with religion majors as a 200 level course about sacred place.

What advice do you have for students interested in exploring the intersections of religion and law?

Keep exploring them, in whatever religious tradition you're interested in. Reading case law has a fascinating way of sharpening interpretive questions and showing their relevance. Legal cases also tell stories: there are always protagonists (sometimes as in Hindu Temple disputes, the gods themselves are legal parties!); there are often different cultural or religious assumptions at play in terms of how protagonists narrate their view of the story (what legal status does respect for ancestors carry in land developments involving ancient remains?), and there is always a resolution, for better or for worse.

New Book by Professor Roger Jackson



Professor Roger Jackson, (John W. Nason Professor of Asian Studies and Religion, Emeritus) has published a new book: *Mind Seeing Mind: Mahāmudrā and the Geluk Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism* (Wisdom Publications, 2019). *Mind Seeing Mind* provides a thorough study of one of the most important practices in Tibetan Buddhism as well as translations of a number of its key texts, and has been selected as the winner of the 2020 Toshihide Numata Book Award in Buddhism.

What is mahāmudrā, and why did you write a book about it?

Mahāmudrā is a Sanskrit word that means “great seal.” While it has many different meanings, in Tibetan Buddhism it came above all to refer to the true nature of our mind — as empty, luminous, and blissful — and to meditation practices for realizing that true nature, which allows us to become fully enlightened beings. I've been fascinated by mahāmudrā since I first read about it in Nepal in my early 20's. I was drawn to its seeming “mystical” alternative to the scholasticism that dominates the Geluk tradition I was studying (the tradition of the Dalai Lamas). What's more, its Indian and Tibetan masters wrote wonderful poetic songs to express their realization, and I've always enjoyed reading and writing poetry. But it turned out that there was mahāmudrā in the Geluk, too, so once I learned some Tibetan, I began reading Geluk mahāmudrā sources. That led me to look deeply into Gelukpa mahāmudrā literature, but also into mahāmudrā in other Tibetan schools, and the Indian Buddhist sources of the practice. Basically, I wrote the book to bring out the history of mahāmudrā in the Geluk, partly because no one had done so before, and partly to show that the Geluk wasn't only about scholastic hair-splitting — that it had a mystical, meditative side as well. The process took me thirty years — I began it around the time my son was born, and it was published just after my grandson was born.

What is significant in grounding mahāmudrā in the context of contemporary religious studies? How does your book achieve this, and do you have any main takeaways for students interested in exploring this relationship?

The book is very long, and goes into quite a bit of historical and textual detail. Knowing this isn't going to be everyone's cup of tea, I included a section that steps back and raises “big picture” questions that the study and

practice of mahāmudrā pose. I discuss them not just in terms of mahāmudrā traditions in Tibet but in Buddhist studies more broadly and religious studies – especially the study of mysticism. The questions touch on such basic issues as whether ultimate reality is expressible, whether all mystics experience the same reality, what place there is in the mystical life for rationality, ritual, faith, or ethics, and—perhaps most basic of all—what the mind is. A number of non-specialist readers have found this section to be a gateway to appreciating what the more scholarly sections and translations are trying to accomplish, though in some cases, they just read that section and leave it at that.

In your research, what texts stand out to you as exciting/particularly interesting?

I'm endlessly fascinated by Buddhist debates about emptiness — they're the equivalent of Jewish, Christian, or Muslim arguments about the nature of God — so mucking around in the philosophical texts was great fun. Also, I've always enjoyed reading the mystical songs of Indian and Tibetan tantric masters — Saraha, Milarepa, figures like that — and I think that of the translations I included in the book, the ones that pleased me most were the twenty-two “songs of experience” by the First Panchen Lama. Although there still are things I would change, I got great pleasure out of trying to shape the translated poems in such a way that they read decently as poetry in English. This includes not trying to duplicate Tibetan meters or sound patterns, which basically can't be done without disastrous results.

How does your research change/influence your understanding of Tibetan Buddhism?

I think my many years of working on the book deepened my appreciation for just how complex and multifaceted each of the Tibetan traditions really is. They each contain countless dimensions, and you can't ever reduce them to stereotypes or caricatures, like, “all the Gelukpas do is study and debate but they don't bother to meditate,” or “Kagyupas are addicted to meditation but they have no idea what they're meditating on.” This is a lesson that I've learned over the years from engaging with — and teaching — multiple religious traditions, but it was nice to work it out in my scholarship as well. I also learned, and hope I showed, that the kinds of issues “particular” to premodern Tibetan Buddhists echo intellectual and practical concerns found elsewhere in the Buddhist world, and in religious traditions more generally. It's a good reminder that whatever our differences in time, place, and culture are, we all as human beings wrestle with the meaning of life and tend to arrive at many of the same questions, if not necessarily the same answers. And if we did all give the same answer, what fun would that be?

Religion Department Fall Book Group

While we strive as a department to address issues of race and religion in our course readings, discussions, and assignments, the events of the past few months have revealed in stark terms that there is much more work to do. In our statement in June (published on our website), the Religion department committed to engaging and altering the range of issues studied and discussed in the religious studies community and in our classrooms. Since then, the department has been brainstorming ways to improve and expand upon our approach to teaching,

discussing, and learning about the topic of race and religion. To further this goal, the Carleton Religion department will be introducing a book group in the Fall 2020 term under the leadership of the Religion SDAs, Carly Bell and Tegan Carlson. Through this group, we hope to engage religion students, faculty, and alumni in thinking about religion and race by reading and discussing James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, a book that will be required material for both RELG 110 and Religion A&I students this year.

Book group meetings will likely be held monthly via Zoom during Fall term (more details to come). Religion majors and students taking RELG 110 are strongly encouraged to attend, as are Religion faculty and alumni. If you have questions and suggestions, or would like to get involved, please email Carly (bellc2@carleton.edu) and Tegan (carlsont2@carleton.edu).

Senior Comps Titles 2019-2020

❖ = Distinction in comps ➤ = Bardwell Smith Prize for Excellence in the Study of Religion

Sacrality of the Mosque of Cordoba during the Muslim Caliphate || **Malika Adda-Berkane**

❖ ➤ “Become Black with God!”: A Black Theological Response to Afropessimism || **Jorge Banuelos**

Coffeehouses and Counterpublics: An Exploration of Da’wa || **Sarah Chebli**

(Re)making the Man: Hindutva Ritual Masculinity as Mutable Schema || **Jack Coyne**

Completely Sincere, Completely Pragmatic: Apocalyptic Imagery in Daesh’s Online English Language Media || **Ernest Matthew Finney-Jordet**

❖ ‘I’m 1 & Allah 1 & no want give up’: Lived Religion Among Refugees Seeking Asylum || **Laura Kiernan**

Defining Rob Bell and the Emergent Church Movement || **Liz Moore**

The Lynching Ritual: Violence as Ritual Empowerment and Social Consumption || **Cruz Morales**

➤ iBelieve: Religiously-Infused Consumerism in Apple’s ‘Think Different’ Campaign || **Kate Rosenfeld**

(Dis)Respecting Difference: An Examination of Christian Pluralism || **Tim Winter-Nelson**

Sacred Face: *El Capitan as Sacred Space* || **Owen Yager**

Class of 2017 - COVID Connections

Kristen received a very warm message from Claire Rostov and the Class of 2017:



Hi Kristen,

I hope you're doing well! I just wanted to drop a quick note and share a bright spot from the pandemic. The five religion majors from the class of '17 have been hanging out on zoom and catching up. We talk often about how grateful we are for our incredible professors in the Religion Department.

All the best,
Claire Rostov '17

(Pictured: Gillian Applegate, August "Gus" Leinbach, Nick Lorenz, Connor Rechtzigel, Claire Rostov)

Fall 2020 Course Offerings

RELG 100: Christianity and Colonialism

RELG 110: Understanding Religions

RELG 130: Native American Religions

RELG 155: Hinduism: An Introduction

RELG 217: Faith and Doubt in the Modern Age

RELG 242: Oh My G*d: Christianity and Sexual Revolutions

RELG 280: The Politics of Sex in Asian Religions