

RELT20131:
Christianity, Modernity, Tradition



Le Corbusier's Sainte Marie de La Tourette, France (1957). Photograph taken by Pierre Varga.

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Course Description

Is Christianity a revolutionary or a conservative force? How do Christian notions of the self and community influence modern formulations of human rights? Do we live in a disenchanted world? Is capitalism based on a belief system? And how were twentieth-century innovations in architecture and urban design inspired by pre-modern Christian ideas? In this course we will attempt to answer these questions by engaging with authors from a number of disciplines (history, philosophy, sociology, theology) who have wrestled with the complex interaction between Christianity, modernity and tradition. In the first part, we will examine the broader historical contours of this dynamic by unpacking Max Weber's disenchantment thesis; Marcel Gauchet's political history of Christianity; and Yves Congar's theorisation of tradition as a mobile and dynamic phenomenon. In the second part, we will look at recent interventions by intellectual historians who have questioned some of the central claims of the authors in the first part, including Eugene McCarragher's extraordinary assertion that capitalism, as manifest in nineteenth and twentieth-century America, is a form of belief system; James Chappel's analysis of how Christian thinkers (e.g. Jacques Maritain, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Paul Vignaux) developed theories on totalitarianism and human rights; and Sarah Shortall's exploration of a cluster of thinkers (e.g. Henri de Lubac, Gaston Fessard, Marie-Dominique Chenu) who mobilised religious ideas in the context of debates within the philosophy of history and within existentialist circles in post-War France. In the final part the focus will be on how the ideas explored the first two parts were integrated in modernist buildings across France, the UK and the US during the twentieth-century.

Key Themes and Concepts

- Christianity and capitalism
- Disenchantment
- Incarnation and revolution
- Tradition and traditions
- Human rights and totalitarianism
- Labour and liturgy
- Redemption
- The sacred and the built space

Teaching Methods

1 two-hour lecture and 1 one-hour seminar per week.

Assessments

1. 2000-word essay (50%)
2. 2-hour exam (50%)

Indicative Reading

Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie & Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Charly Coleman, *The Spirit of French Capitalism: Economic Theology in the Age of Enlightenment* (Stanford: California University Press, 2021)

Jay P. Corrin, *Catholic Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democracy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

James Chappel, *Catholic Modern: The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, trans. Oscar Burge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

Eugene McCarragher, *The Enchantments of Mammon: How Capitalism Became the Religion of Modernity* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

Catherine Osborne, *American Catholics and the Churches of Tomorrow: Building Churches for the Future, 1925–1975* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2018).

Robert Proctor, *Building the Modern Church: Roman Catholic Church Architecture in Britain, 1955 to 1975* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

Stefan Schwarzkopf (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Economic Theology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

Sarah Shortall, *Soldiers of God in a Secular World: Catholic Theology and Twentieth Century French Politics* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2021).

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Routledge: London and New York, 2001).