**Lecture: Week 1 of the Think Write Publish online course**

**Note: the recorded version of Week 1 lecture was an oral delivery of the written text**

My name is Olga Naidenko and I am pleased to open the first week of the Think Write Publish Science and Religion online course. On behalf of the entire team who developed this course, I am pleased to welcome all students from far and wide to join us in this course.

Science and religion are large topics, and each deserves – and has received – a library worth of writings. In this course, our goal is to explore your individual stories as a way to fit the grand, macro-scale perspectives on science and religion into the personal narratives that will focus on specific events, settings and experiences.

Over the period of 4 weeks, students will write short scenes and text pieces, bringing to life telling moments that embody their own engagement in at the cross-roads of science and religion. This course is unique because it is developed and taught by Think Write Publish 2016-2017 fellows who developed personal narratives about their experience of harmonies between science and religion.

As we start week 1, the first question is, “What is Your Story?” What personal moments stand out for you as examples of agreement or divergence between science and religion? When have your first encountered these two grand domains where they seemed to be in conflict – or perhaps in concord with each other? Why is this topic important to you? What is at stake for you?

The primary learning activity for this week – and the following three weeks – is writing. As samples of what a personal story drawn from your memories of religion and science can look like, we are sharing as yet unpublished excerpts from two 2017 fellows, Olga Naidenko, the lead teaching fellow for week 1, and Mark Notturno. The excerpts show specific scenes that stood out for the narrator as an important moment in her or his understanding of the interface between, religion, science, family and society.

Reading the excerpts and annotated notes you can glimpse how these scenes are crafted, how the story weaves scenic description with background information, and what details help the characters come off the page and look like real, interesting people.

The student activity is writing to discover: dipping into your memory to find a story from your life where the practices of science and religion shaped how the scene developed, influenced the thoughts and actions of the story participants and connected the specific experience with the theme of inter-relationship between science and religion.

As an alternative suggestion, you could also describe, through images and dialogues, your powerful memory, maybe your earliest clear memory, connected to science and religion. Perhaps there was an unforgettable visit to a science lab? A school experiment or science fair project? A religious holiday in your childhood? Or some other event in your childhood, youth or adulthood where you felt deeply connected with religion or science – or deeply dissatisfied with them?

For this week, we suggest additional readings you might find interesting or helpful. Note that you don’t have to agree with the perspectives of the authors of those pieces. These readings are presented only as examples of how different thinkers have engages with the themes of religion and science (that’s the 2006 New York Times essay by George Johnson and 2014 essay by Sana Saeed published in Salon online).

We also recommend for you to peruse two articles about writing essays. Published in the 2016 issues of the Brevity magazine, these articles share the experience of two non-fiction writers who, just like the students in this course, look to writing as a way to find their own inner truth and to answer their own inner questions.

And with this brief introduction, let’s get writing! The Think Write Publish team is grateful for the opportunity to share this writing journey with you.