

RS 620
APPROACHES TO COMPARATIVE RELIGION

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Purpose and Outline of the Course

What is religion? Is it a psychological projection? A social construction? A political maneuver? Or a genuine encounter with the Sacred? Is religion common to and basically the same among all human beings everywhere in all historical periods? Or is it radically different in different cultures and different historical contexts? Why is religion so often tied to violence, political conflict and bloodshed? And what is the role of religion in our own increasingly globalized, interconnected but often violent world at the dawn of the new millennium?

This course will engage in a critical examination of all of these questions through close readings of the most important methods and theories for the study of religion. We will begin by asking the basic question: what is (and isn't) religion?, using as our test case the controversial new movement known as the Raelians. We will then examine the most important modern theories from the nineteenth century to the present, including Marxist, psychoanalytic, sociological, anthropological, phenomenological, feminist and post-modern approaches to religion. Finally, we will conclude with the question of what role religion has to play today in the context of transnationalism, globalization and the war on terrorism.

REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATIONS

Evaluations in this class will be based on three things:

1. Participation (33% of final grade)

This means a) regular attendance to all classes; b) doing all readings; and c) active participation in class discussions. More than three unexcused absences may (i.e., probably will) result in a lower grade.

2. Group oral presentations on the readings (33%). Each class a small group of students will present the day's readings. Presentations should be no longer than 10-15 minutes and should demonstrate how the particular theory would apply to a specific example of religious belief or practice. For example, how would Freud interpret the Catholic Mass? How would Marx interpret Osama bin Laden's attack on the World Trade Towers? Alternatively, students could demonstrate the ways in which that particular theory does *not* adequately explain a specific example.

3. Three written papers (4-6 pages each) based on questions distributed in class.

READINGS

There will be a series of readings available on Electronic reserve. Go to the OSCAR web-page and click on *Find Reserves by: Course or Prof/TA*
the URL is: <http://library.ohio-state.edu/search/p>

In addition there will be three **required texts**:

Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and Profane : The Nature of Religion* (Harvest Books, 1968)
Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking About Religion After September 11* (Chicago, 2002)
Daniel L. Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion* (Oxford, 1996)

I have also ordered the following recommended texts which students may wish to buy if they want a more thorough introduction to the authors we examine in class. I especially recommend buying these texts to any student interested in pursuing religious studies at the graduate level.

Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford, 2001)
Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1989)
Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 2000)
Rita M. Gross, *Feminism and Religion* (Beacon Press, 1996)
Russell T. McCutcheon, *Critics Not Caretakers* (SUNY, 2001)
John Raines, ed., *Marx on Religion* (Temple, 2002)
Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago, 1988)

STUDENT RIGHTS AND CONDUCT

Any student with a documented disability who may require special accommodations should identify him or herself to the instructor as early in the quarter as possible to receive effective and timely accommodations. You may also wish to contact the Office for Disability Services (150 Pomerene Hall, 292-3307).

Students are expected to know and understand the rules regarding academic misconduct, particularly the rules regarding plagiarism, as stated in the University's Code of Student Conduct. All cases of plagiarism will be treated very seriously according to the University's guidelines.

SYLLABUS

- Week I WHAT IS RELIGION, and Why bother with Theory?**
- April 1 **Introduction: Theorizing Religion -- what's the Point?**
- April 3 **What is and Isn't Religion? A Test Case: the Raelian Movement**
- Read: Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious" (Electronic Reserve under "Taylor")
View on-line the following three web-sites:
 " The Raelian Revolution" (<http://www.rael.org/>)
 "Raelians" (<http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/rael.html>)
 <http://www.cnn.com/2002/HEALTH/12/28/human.cloning/index.html>
- Week II 19th CENTURY CRITIQUES OF RELIGION: Evolutionary Theory and Marxism**
- April 8 **Magic, Religion and Science: Frazer and Tylor**
Read: Pals, chapter 1
Tylor, "Animism" (ER under "Lessa")
- April 10 **The Opiate of the People: Karl Marx**
Read: *Marx on Religion* (ER under Raines)
Pals, chapter 4
- Week III NEUROSIS OR INDIVIDUATION? Psychological Approaches**
- April 15 **Religion as Neurosis and Illusion: Freud**
Read: Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (ER)
Pals, chapter 2
- April 17 **Religion as Psychological Integration and Individuation**
Read: Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (ER)
- * * * * *First Paper Due April 22* * * * *
- Week IV SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES**
- April 22 **Religion as Social Integration: Durkheim**
Read: Durkheim, "Elementary Forms of the Religious Life" (ER under Lessa)
Pals, chapter 3
- April 24 **The Economics of Religion**
Read: Weber, *The Protestant Ethic* (ER)
- Week V STRUCTURE AND CULTURE: Anthropological Approaches**
- April 29 **The Logic of the "Savage Mind": Structuralism**
Read: Levi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth" (ER under Lessa)
- May 1 **Cultural Anthropology: Turner and Geertz**

Read: Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" (ER under Lessa)
Turner, *The Ritual Process* (ER)
Pals, chapter 7

Week VI THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS AND THE CHICAGO SCHOOL

May 6 **The Golden Age of the Chicago School: Wach and Eliade**
Read: Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*
Pals, chapter 5

May 8 **Eliade and his critics**
Read: Ivan Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth* (ER)

*** * * * Second Paper Due May 13 * * * ***

Week VII THE CHICAGO SCHOOL AFTER ELIADE: Smith and Doniger

May 13 **Imagining Religion: Jonathan Z. Smith**
Read: Smith, selections from *Imagining Religion* (ER)

May 15 **Understanding Other Peoples' Myths: Wendy Doniger**
Read: Doniger, *Other Peoples' Myths* (ER)

Week VIII THE CHICAGO SCHOOL AFTER ELIADE: Lincoln

May 20 **Eliade turned on his Head: Bruce Lincoln**

Read: *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, selections (ER)
"Theses on Method" (distributed in class)
Begin: *Holy Terrors*

May 22 **Lincoln, cont.**
Finish: *Holy Terrors*

Week IX DISCOURSE, POWER AND GENDER

May 27 **Genealogies of Religion: Michel Foucault and Talal Asad**
Read: Foucault, "Pastoral Power and Political Reason" (ER)
Asad, "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category" (ER)

May 29 **Feminist Critiques**
Read: Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (ER)
Gross, *Feminism and Religion* (ER)

Week X CRITICS OR CARETAKERS? Rethinking Religious Studies Today

June 2 **Manufacturing and Deconstructing Religion**
Read: McCutcheon, *Critics not Caretakers* (ER)

June 4 **Summary and Conclusions: How do we – or can we – study religion in a secular state**
University today?

***** Final Paper Due Monday June 9 *****