

INTRODUCTION TO RELIGIOUS STUDIES

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Since the beginnings of modern religious studies in the mid-19th century, scholars have meant a great many things by the term 'religion,' from belief in supernatural beings, to a form of neurosis, to an encounter with the sublime. Many scholars today would even dismiss the idea that we can isolate a single definition of the term, especially when we consider religious beliefs and practices within a truly global context. This course will not be a survey of the major world religions. Our investigation will indeed take us around the world, from the study of Australian aborigines, to the Nuer people of East Africa, to contemporary American churches. However, our aim will be to use such case studies to reflect upon religious studies as a discipline.

In the first half of the course we will look at how the study of religion has been shaped by its intersections with the fields of sociology, anthropology, psychology, and phenomenology. You will become familiar with such major thinkers as Émile Durkheim, William James, Sigmund Freud, Max Weber, Mircea Eliade, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Clifford Geertz. In the second half of the course, we will see how the methodologies we have surveyed offer differing accounts of key religious phenomena, including ritual, symbolism, and the division between sacred and profane. By the end of the course, you should be able to think critically about the strengths and shortcomings of several major approaches to the study of religion, which you can draw upon in future coursework in religious studies. There are no prerequisites for this course.

EVALUATION

20% Response Papers (250 words each): You must write 4 total response papers. You should complete 2 such papers during Part I of the course, and 2 during Part II. These are not formal essays. Your goal should simply be to highlight aspects of the reading you found interesting and to raise questions for class discussion.

40% Two Quizzes: Choose 2 out of 5 questions to respond to in short essays (roughly 20 mins. per question), identify and explain the significance of 5 quotations from major texts we have read, and provide definitions for 10 key terms we have discussed in class.

40% Final Exam: Choose 4 out of 8 questions to respond to in short essays (roughly 20 mins. per question) and identify and explain the significance of 10 quotations from major texts we have read, and provide definitions for 10 key terms we have discussed in class.

SET TEXTS

- Course Reader = READER in syllabus.
- *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. Michael Lambek (Blackwell, 2008) = LAMBEK
- *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert Segal (Blackwell, 2006) = SEGAL
- Sigmund Freud, *Future of an Illusion* (1927)
- Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1961)
- Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (1967)

SYLLABUS

~PART I~

WEEK 1: ORIGINS OF RELIGION / ORIGINS OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

- HANDOUT: Selections from James Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (1890)
- LAMBEK, pp. 23-33: E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (1871)

WEEK 2: SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES

- SEGAL, pp. 171-190: Grace Davie, "Sociology of Religion"
- LAMBEK, pp. 34-47: Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912)

WEEK 3: SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES (continued)

- LAMBEK, pp. 48-56: Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-5)
 - Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (1967): "Religion as World Construction" and "Sociological Definitions of Religion," pp. 3-28, 175-177
- >Friday class held at Yellowstone Art Museum

WEEK 4: ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES

- SEGAL, pp. 3-23: Fiona Bowie, "Anthropology of Religion"
- READER: E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1937), pp. vii-xxxii
- READER: Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Structural Analysis in Linguistics and in Anthropology," *Structural Anthropology*, (1958), pp. 31-54

WEEK 5: ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES (continued)

- LAMBEK, pp. 57-74: Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973)
- LAMBEK, pp. 110-123: Talal Asad, "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category," *Genealogies of Religion* (1993)

***** Quiz 1 *****

WEEK 6: PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES

- SEGAL, pp. 147-169: Roderick Main, "Psychology of Religion"
- READER: William James, *Conclusions, Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), pp. 377-402

WEEK 7: PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES (continued)

- Sigmund Freud, *Future of an Illusion* (1927), pp. 5-71

WEEK 8: PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACHES

- SEGAL, pp. 91-119: Thomas Ryba, "Phenomenology of Religion"
- READER: Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (1917), pp. 1-30

WEEK 9: PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACHES (continued)

- READER: Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1961), pp. 8-65

~PART II~

WEEK 10: SACRED & PROFANE

- Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1961), pp. 68-115
- READER: Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), Bk III, ch. 5, pp. 392-417
- LAMBEK, pp. 183-195: Mary Douglas, "Land Animals, Pure & Impure," *Leviticus as Literature* (1999)

WEEK 11: RITUAL

- SEGAL, pp. 397-409: Catherine Bell, "Ritual"

- LAMBEK, pp. 326-339: Victor Turner, "Liminality and Communitas," *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969)
- READER: Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), pp. 412-455

***** Quiz 2 *****

WEEK 12: SYMBOLS

- Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1961), pp. 136-138
- LAMBEK: E.E. Evans-Pritchard, "The Problem of Symbols," *Nuer Religion* (1956), pp. 139-149
- READER: Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Effectiveness of Symbols," *Structural Anthropology* (1958), pp. 186-205.
- READER: Mary Douglas, "Out of the Cave," *Natural Symbols* (1970), pp. 160-170

WEEK 13: IMAGE & IDOL

- READER: Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (1917), pp. 65-71
- READER: David Morgan, "Introduction," *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (1998), pp. 1-20
- READER: Graham Howes, *The Art of the Sacred* (2007), pp. 6-28

WEEK 14: CIVIL RELIGION & SECULARIZATION

- SEGAL, pp. 413-428: Steve Bruce, "Secularization"
- LAMBEK, pp. 509-517: Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Beyond Belief* (1967)
- READER: Benedict Anderson, "Introduction," *Imagined Communities* (1983), pp. 1-7
- Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (1967), pp. 105-125

WEEK 15: DIASPORA

- READER: Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Theorizing Diaspora*
- READER: Homi Bhabha, "Introduction," *The Location of Culture* (1994), pp. 1-27
- READER: Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity," *Theorizing Diaspora*

***** Final Exam *****

N.B. Topics covered in Part II in future years may include: myth, magic and witchcraft, mysticism, conversion, religious violence, pilgrimage, death and mourning, gifts and sacrifices, nature/ecology, cults and new religious movements, and gender and sexuality.