INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION
REL 120, Early Morning Edition, Fall 2011

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And by appointment

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And by appointment

Overview:
This course is intended to introduce the student to the practice of studying religion, and to key
theories, theorists, and debates relevant to the study of religion. How can we go about
studying religion, and what tools might we use? What is it that we study when we study
religion? Mirroring the highly interdisciplinary nature of religious studies, we will engage
with the work of anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, philosophers, and literary
scholars. As we read their work, we will consider what they mean by “religion,” the strengths
and blindnesses of their methodology, and the ways that we could put their theoretical
reflections to practical use. We will also think about what it means to explain religion. Is
something of the “lived experience” of religious adherents lost when religious belief, practice,
or language is reduced to being the effects of “objective” forces (and what could these
polymorphous terms mean)?

Objectives:
By the end of the course the student should be able to:
1) Identify important theorists for the study of religion, describe the theories they advance,
and offer critiques of those theories.
2) Distinguish between the academic study of religion and personal religious commitment.
3) Plan and conduct a small independent research project, applying the discussion of
methodology in class.

Workload:
Conventional wisdom holds that, for each hour a student spends in class, she or he should
spend three hours on coursework outside of class. That means that, for our class, you should
anticipate spending about 8 hours outside of class on coursework. If you find yourself
spending significantly more or significantly less time, please speak with the instructor.
Grading:
1/3: Final Examination (Dec. 12, 8am)
1/3: Two Quizzes (Sept. 21 & Oct. 19) and Group Project (Due Nov. 28 right after Thanksgiving break.)
1/3: Participation Activities & Reading Responses (13 weekly; grade will be calculated out of 12)
Note: We compute averages of letter grades, not percentages. Late reading responses will receive half credit and will not receive feedback.

Textbooks for Purchase:

Other Required Readings:
Are available through Blackboard. You must bring a paper copy of the readings to class during the relevant week. I would recommend printing them all out, punching three holes in them, and putting them in a binder.

Reading Responses:
By 9pm each Sunday, you will e-mail the instructor, teaching assistant, and classmates in your small group a three paragraph response to the readings assigned for the coming week. Put your text in the body of your e-mail, or attach as a pdf. These can be quite informal but should be taken seriously: you are encouraged to relate the readings to your own experiences, current events, other readings, etc. Do not worry if you did not fully understand the readings. However, your response should clearly demonstrate that you have read and engaged with the text. Directly quoting the text or referring to specific pages is encouraged (footnotes are not necessary). If you are having trouble making sense of the readings, I would suggest focusing in on a small section, even just a sentence or two, and trying to figure out what it means and how it might relate to what else the author is saying. Responses are ungraded but recorded; late responses will receive half credit. If at any point you would like to know which reading responses you are missing, just contact the teaching assistant.

Absences:
Note that you are responsible for finding out what happened in class when you were absent. If you miss an examination due to illness or other extreme circumstances, contact the instructor as soon as (medically) possible.

Electronic Devices
Students who have excelled in previous versions of this class have not used electronic devices such as cell phone, laptops, or other electronic devices. Things that make noise should be silenced.
**Academic Integrity**
The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see http://academicintegrity.syr.edu.

**Disability Accommodations**
Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to the instructor and review those accommodations with the instructor. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, planning for accommodations as early as possible is necessary. For further information, see the ODS website, Office of Disability Services http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/

**New Policy regarding Faith Tradition Observances**
This fall is the first semester in which SU will not have non-instructional days for any religious holiday and the first semester in which students must notify instructors by the end of the second week of classes when they will be observing their religious holiday(s). SU’s religious observances policy, found at http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm, recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. Students will have access to a notification form through MySlice for two weeks beginning the first day of class.
Schedule:
Note: with the exception of the first week of class, readings are to be completed by Monday of the week indicated.

August 29, 31  Introduction: What is “Religion”?

September 7  Explanations: Comparative and Sociological

September 12, 14  Explanations: Psychological
→ Karen McCarthy Brown, Mama Lola, 1-78

September 19, 21  Religion and/as Society: Durkheim
→ Karen McCarthy Brown, Mama Lola, 79-140
→ Quiz #1 on September 21th

September 26, 28  Religion and/as Society: Douglas
→ Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 36-71
→ Karen McCarthy Brown, Mama Lola, 141-202

October 3, 5  Religion and/as Society: Turner
→ Karen McCarthy Brown, Mama Lola, 203-258

October 10, 12  Religion and/as Society: Geertz
→ Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System” in The Interpretation of Culture (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 87-125
→ Karen McCarthy Brown, Mama Lola, 259-310
October 17, 19         Critique of Religion and/as Society: Asad
→ Quiz #2 on October 17th

October 24, 26        Philosophical Questions
→ Film: Lars von Trier, *Breaking the Waves* (Note: we will watch in class; film will also be on reserve in the library)

October 31, November 2 Critique of Philosophical Questions
→ Friedrich Nietzsche, First Treatise *On the Genealogy of Morality* ed. K. Ansell-Parson
  (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1-34
→ Film: Lars von Trier, *Manderlay* (Note: we will watch in class; film will also be on reserve in the library)

November 7, 9        Phenomenology of Religion

November 14, 16      Critique of Phenomenology of Religion

November 28, 30      Rhetoric of Religion
→ Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, selections
→ Presentation of Projects

December 5, 7         Rhetoric of Religion
→ Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, selections
→ Presentation of Projects