

REL 603: "Theories and Methods in the Study of Religion II"

Syracuse University
Spring 2017
Tuesday 12:30-3:15, 504 Hall of Languages

Instructor:

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Office hours by appointment

Course Description:

This required seminar is designed to introduce graduate students in the Department of Religion to five major 20th century theorists of religion, deepening and extending their understanding of the history, development, and current state of the field of the academic study of religion.

Course Requirements:

Attendance and participation: Attend all classes, read all assigned texts carefully and thoughtfully, and come to class prepared to contribute actively to discussion of those texts. For each class, you should have followed up on *at least* one footnote or reference from the readings and be ready to share your findings. 20% of semester grade.

Abstracts: For each class, write a 300-word abstract for one of the chapters or essays assigned (excluding reference articles such as those in the *Companion to the Study of Religion*); post your abstract on Blackboard by Sunday evening, to give your classmates time to read it before class; revise your abstract as necessary following class discussion. The abstract should include: the main point of the argument; several essential subordinate points or examples; a brief analysis of how the argument of the reading relates to the topic of the course and to other select readings assigned for the day or for prior weeks. 30% (or 2% each) of semester grade.

Short papers: Write one concise 1500-word paper on Jung and Eliade (due March 14), another on Geertz, Smith, and Asad (due May 9), in which you analyze a theme, issue, or problem of your choice, comparing, contrasting, and assessing how each thinker engages it. Make full use of the readings assigned for the course and include at least three readings (primary or secondary) not assigned for the course. 40% (or 20% each) of semester grade.

Final reflection: Write one concise 1000-word paper discussing the possible implications of our study of each of the five thinkers for your own research. Post by Sunday evening before the last class and come to that class prepared not only to present your own reflections but also to respond to those of your classmates. 10% of semester grade.

Texts:

Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1993)

Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (NY: Harcourt, 1959; original, 1957)

Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (Basic Books, 1973)

Carl Gustav Jung, *The Essential Jung*, selected and introduced by A. Storr (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1983/2013)

Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982)

*other readings will be available through the library or posted on Blackboard

Schedule of readings and discussions:

1/17 History, Comparison, Mystique, Critique: Religious Studies in the 20th Century

- Gregory Alles, "The study of religions: the last 50 years," in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 39-55
- Bruce Lincoln, *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars: Critical Explorations in the History of Religions* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2012), pp. 1-3, 121-136
- Jeffrey J. Kripal, *The Serpent's Gift: Gnostic Reflections on the Study of Religion* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 1-27, 90-120

1/24 Religion and/as Therapy: Carl Jung

- Dan Merkur, "Psychology of religion," in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 186-202
- Storr, *The Essential Jung*, Parts 3, 4, 7

1/31 Carl Jung, continued

- David L. Miller, "Misprision: Pitfalls in Teaching Jung," in K. Bulkeley and C. Weldon, eds., *Teaching Jung* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 29-50
- Storr, *The Essential Jung*, Parts 8, 9, 10

2/7 Eranos and the History of Religions: from Jung to Eliade (guest: David L. Miller)

- David L. Miller, "On the Edge of the Round Table: Eranos and Theological Studies," *Spring: A Journal of Archetype and Culture* 92 (2015): 153-67
- Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1999), pp. 3-36, 67-82, 100-111, 183-199, 237-249

1/14 **Mircea Eliade**

- Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, Intro, Ch. 1 & 2

2/21 **Mircea Eliade, continued**

- Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, Ch. 3 & 4 and HR Chronology

2/28 **The Anthropological Turn: from Eliade to Geertz**

- Daniel Gold, *Aesthetics and Analysis in Writing on Religion: Modern Fascinations* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003), Introduction and Part 2 (ebook, SU library)
- Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, Part I

3/7 **Clifford Geertz**

- Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, Part III

SPRING BREAK

3/21 **Geertz and his Critics**

- Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, Part V
- Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, Ch. 1

3/28 **A New Style of History of Religions: Jonathan Z. Smith**

- Smith, *Imagining Religion*, Intro – Ch. 4

4/4 **Jonathan Z. Smith, continued**

- Smith, *Imagining Religion*, Ch. 5-7

4/11 **The Postcolonial Critique of Religion: Talal Asad**

- Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, Intro, Ch. 2, Ch. 6

4/18 **Talal Asad, continued**

- Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, Ch. 3-4

4/25 **After religion?**

- Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003), selections
- Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2013), selections
- Daniel Boyarin and Carlin Barton, *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities* (NY: Fordham Univ. Press, 2016), selections

5/2 **Student presentations**