RELIGIOUS STUDIES 210
THEORIES IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION
COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON
Spring 2015

Dr. John Huddlestun
4B Glebe, Room 203 (use sidewalk entrance)
Office hours: MW 3:00 - 5:00 (or by appointment)
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COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course introduces the student to the academic study of religion by surveying some of the more significant and influential theories (past and present) regarding its origin and function, as proposed by scholars in this and related disciplines (e.g., sociology, anthropology, psychology). This survey encompasses a broad range of issues and debates, including: what is religion (e.g., description versus explanation), who gets to define it (outsider/insider problem), the place of religion in the academy, theories of its origin, religion as a socio-political and psychological tool, the place of religious experience as a source of authority, the variegated feminist critique of traditional approaches, and the proper role of the scholar of religion in the public arena. Throughout the semester, we will read closely and critically, discussing and debating the potential strengths and weaknesses of each reading. We will explore the applicability of the theories to three test cases (three documentary films, the last being an experiment in creating a religion). In addition to some familiarity with the origins, development, and theoretical orientation of the academic discipline, students should develop a critical and reflexive awareness of how their own presuppositions, as well as those of the scholars they read, inform the way in which religion is defined and studied.

Some questions to think about during this course:
What is “religion”? What is a religion?
How did religion come into being?
Are people naturally religious, in one form or another?
Can (or should) religion/religions be explained, or only experienced or described?
What is the function or purpose of religion?
Can one theory account for all religious traditions or only individual ones?
Is belief or membership in a religious tradition/group a prerequisite for understanding or describing it?
Should scholars be neutral observers or serve as religious or cultural critics in the public arena?
Who speaks for a particular group or religious tradition generally?
Does it make sense to speak of “fake,” “pseudo,” or “inauthentic” religions?
Is everyone an expert on religion?

REQUIRED TEXTS
Required readings are available on OAKS. It is your responsibility to access and download or print out the reading materials before each class (or have them available online). Please plan this far enough in advance so as to avoid coming to class without the reading because of computer, printer, financial, or canine/feline problems.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Mid-Term exam (20%) and Final exam (25%). Both exams consist of passage identification and essays. The final exam (not cumulative) will be somewhat longer than the midterm. It is imperative that you notify me in advance if you are unable to take an exam. You may call me at my office (with voice mail) or leave a message at the Department of Religious Studies (numbers listed above). Make-up exams, if I allow them, may be of increased difficulty and must be taken as soon as possible after the original exam time, within a day or two at the most. Only those who provide what I deem to be a valid excuse (and authorized by the Office of Undergraduate Studies) will be allowed to take a make-up exam.

Two Case Study Papers (the first is 8% of your grade and the second 12%). During the course of the term, we will view two documentary films (see Schedule for dates) and you will be required to write a short paper (3-4 pages) that applies various theories to each. Separate handouts will be distributed prior to viewing the films, which provide guidelines, including requirements for style and format.

Final Paper/Student Learning Outcome Assignment (15%). At the end of the term, you will turn in an informed and original theoretical analysis (5-6 pages) of the wildly entertaining, but serious, film, Kūmārē: The True Story of a False Prophet (where Vikram Ghandi, an Indian American from New Jersey, creates his own exotic Indian religion as Sri Kumare, guru extraordinaire from “Alikash,” complete with staff and cosmetic lunch box). I will arrange for an evening showing of the film.

Reflection Cards and Class Participation (20%). Over the course of the term, you are required to turn in a total of 12 question cards -- one card per reading (please number each card to keep track of how many you’ve done; half of these should be turned in by spring break). These should consist of a thoughtful, written reflection and/or question based on the assigned reading for that day. Your card should refer to a specific feature or passage from the material so that I can see you have done the reading. The question/comment should be written on a 3x5 card only, and be based on a topic or issue that you find thought-provoking or challenging, and something that might be appropriate for class discussion (given I will be discussing some of these in class). Cards should not simply ask for factual or extraneous information. These will be collected at the beginning of class and cannot be turned in later (I accept cards only from those who are in class); also, unless otherwise stipulated, email submissions are not acceptable, i.e., do not send me your question and skip class. You must attend class to receive credit for that day’s discussion question. Exceptions to these policies are possible only in cases of severe illness or other grave circumstances. In each case, suitable documentation is required.

Students are required to attend class and participate in discussions. Whatever you get out of this course is directly related to how much you put into it. Asking questions, raising concerns, and offering your own ideas in class is a crucial part of this course. You are expected to be an active and informed participant in class discussions. If only a few participate, I will randomly call on individuals to answer questions. If you are consistently unable to respond, particularly if you are rarely in class, or it is clear you’ve not done the readings, this will be noted by me in my little black book of languid, lethargic, and theoretically listless students. Grades for class participation
will be assigned on the basis of the quality and consistency of your involvement in class
discussions. You are permitted a total of **THREE** absences, for whatever reason, over the course
of the term (you need not provide documentation for these). Any number greater than this will
result in a lowered or failing for the course (8 or more absences will result in an automatic
withdrawal). As for reading assignments and participation in class, I will assume that you have
**read the materials before coming to class and will not summarize their content.** I may give
unannounced quizzes if students are not keeping up with the assigned material; these will also
count in my determination of your grade. If you miss class, it is your **responsibility** to obtain
notes on material covered that day (so make friends in class!). Please do not ask me via email to
update you on what happened.

**GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

1) Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various
   expressions of human culture.

2) Students examine relevant primary source materials, as understood by the discipline,
   and interpret these materials in writing assignments.

The above outcomes will be assessed by means of a written assignment, namely, theoretical
analysis of the film, *Kumare* (see above).

**Honor Code Policy** (Please read this sheet carefully, sign it, and return it to me no later than
Tuesday, Jan. 20).

**NOTE:** If you have a disability that qualifies you for academic accommodation, please provide a
letter from the Center for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester and alert me to any
special needs you might have.

**GRADING SCALE**

Final grades are determined in accordance with the following scale:

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COURSE SCHEDULE
(This schedule is subject to revision. Please bring all relevant materials to class!)

Introduction
Jan. 13 - Overview of course; the problem of definition (handout with definitions)

Religion as an Academic Discipline
Jan. 15-20: Gaining Perspective, Historical and Otherwise
Miner, “Body Ritual among the Nacirema” (Oaks #1)
W. Amal, “Definition” (Oaks #2)
J. Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious” (#3)
D. Lopez, “Belief” (#4)

Jan. 22-27: Locating the Academic Study of Religion
S. Gill, “The Academic Study of Religion” (#5)
R. McCutcheon, “More than a Shapeless Beast . . .” (#6)
B. Lincoln, “Theses on Method” (handout)

Jan. 29–Feb. 3: Locating the Scholar of Religion: Insiders and Outsiders
S. Prothero, “Belief Unbracketed: A Case for the Religion Scholar to Reveal
More of Where He or She is Coming From” (#7a)
Responses to Prothero (note especially Orsi and Chidester - #8)
José Cabezón, “Identity and the Work of the Scholar of Religion” (#9)

The Quest for Origins and Orientation
Feb. 5: Frazer on Magic, Religion, and Science
Frazer, “Sympathetic Magic,” “Magic and Religion,” etc. (#10)
Ackerman, “Frazer, James G.” (From on-line reference work, Encyclopedia of
Religion, available via CoF library databases)

Feb. 10: Müller: Creating a “Science of Religion”
Müller, “A Science of Religion” and “The Comparative Study of
Religions,” etc. (#11)
Stone, “Müller, F. Max” (EncRel on-line)

Explaining Religion as a Psychological and Social Phenomenon
Feb. 12-17: Freud - Religion as Neurosis
Freud, The Future of an Illusion (selections; #12a-c)
Brief biography of Freud (#12d)
Preuss, “Psychogenic Theory: Sigmund Freud” (#13) - Optional

Feb. 19-24: Durkheim - Society as the Soul of Religion
Durkheim, Elementary Forms of Religious Life (selections; #14a-d)
“ . . . Religious Sentiment at the Present Time” (14e)
Strenski, “Durkheim. Émile” (EncRel on-line)

**Case Study #1 - Film (Feb. 26):** “The Holy Ghost People” (1967; on Youtube)

***March 3-5 – SPRING BREAK***

**Religion in Ritual and Symbol**
March 10: Turner - Living on the Edge
Turner, “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage” (#16)

***March 12 - MID-TERM EXAM***

**Ritual and Symbol con’t.**
March 17: J. Z. Smith - Ritual as Imaginative Work
Smith, “The Bare Facts of Ritual” (#17)

**I Wanna be an Insider: Religious and Cultural Appropriation**
March 19: Short Film: “White Shamans, Plastic Medicine Men”
Johnson, “Wanting to be Indian...” (#18)
Aldred, “Plastic Shamans and Astroturf Sun Dances” (#19) - Optional

***March 19 - Holy Ghost paper due in class***

**Case Study #2 - Film (March 24):** “The Devil’s Playground” (2002)

**Phenomenology of Religion: Religion as a Unique, Autonomous Phenomenon**

March 26: Otto - It Don’t Mean a Thing if You Don’t Got Experience!
Otto, The Idea of the Holy (selections, #20)
Alles, “Otto, Rudolf” (EncRel on-line)

March 31--April 2: Eliade - The Sacred (“the real”) Unveils Itself
Eliade, “Introduction,” “Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred,” and “Myths=Paradigmatic Model” (#21a-b)
Kitagawa, “Eliade, Mircea” and Rennie, “Eliade, Mircea [Further Considerstions]” (EncRel on-line)

**Experience as a Problematic Phenomenon**
April 7: Sharf, “Experience” (#22)
Mythic Maps: Contextualizing the Sacred
April 9: J. Z. Smith, “Map is Not Territory” (#23)

***April 9 - Devil’s Playground paper due in class***

Religion in a Feminist Mode: Moving Beyond Dead White Males
April 14-16: Shaw, “Feminist Anthropology and the Gendering of Religious Studies” (#24)
Gross, “Defining Feminism, Religion, and the Study of Religion,” from her
Feminism and Religion: An Introduction (#25)
Young, “Having your Cake and Eating it Too: Feminism and Religion” (#26)

The Scholar of Religion as Public Intellectual
April 21-23: McCutcheon, “A Default of Critical Intelligence: The Scholar of Religion
as Public Intellectual” (#27)
Griffiths, “Some Confusions about Critical Intelligence: A Response...” (#28)
O’Connor, “The Scholar of Religion as Public Intellectual: Expanding
Critical Intelligence” (#29)
McCutcheon, “Talking Past Each Other: The Issue of Public Intellectuals
Revisited” (#30)

***FINAL EXAM - April 30 (Thursday) @ 9:00 - 11:00***

***April 27 - Papers on Kumare due in my office no later than 4:00pm***
Readings on OAKS

1) H. Miner, “Body Ritual among the Nacirema”
2) W. Arnal, “Definition”
3) J. Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious”
4) D. Lopez, “Belief”
5) S. Gill, “The Academic Study of Religion”
6) R. McCutcheon, “More than a Shapeless Beast…”
7a) S. Prothero, “Belief Unbracketed: A Case for the Religion Scholar to Reveal More…”
8) Responses to Prothero (by Orsi, Chidester, Klassen, and Griffith)
12a-c) Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (selections)
12d) Brief biography of Freud (by Peter Gay)
13) S. Preuss, “Psychogenic Theory: Sigmund Freud” (optional)
14a-d) Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (selections)
14e) Durkheim, “Religious Sentiment at the Present Time”
16) Victor Turner, “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites of Passage*”
17) J. Z. Smith, “The Bare Facts of Ritual”
18) M. Johnson, “Wanting to be an Indian”
19) L. Aldred, “Plastic Shamans and Astroturf Sun Dances” (optional)
21a-b) Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (selections)
22) R. Sharf, “Experience”
23) J. Z. Smith, “Map is Not Territory”
24) R. Shaw, “Feminist Anthropology and the Gendering of Religious Studies”
26) K. Young, “Having your Cake and Eating it Too: Feminism and Religion”
27) R. McCutcheon, “A Default of Critical Intelligence…”
28) P. Griffiths, “Some Confusions about Critical Intelligence…”
29) J. O’Connor, “The Scholar of Religion as Public Intellectual…”
30) R. McCutcheon, “Talking Past Each Other…”