

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 210
THEORIES IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION
COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON
Spring 2018

Dr. John Huddlestun
4B Glebe, Room 203 (use sidewalk entrance)
Office hours: MW 3:30 - 5:00 (or by appointment)
Office phone: 953-4996 (Dept. 953-0895)
E-mail: huddlestunj@cofc.edu

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 role 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 (or constructed) and studied.

Some questions addressed in this course:

- What is “religion”? What is *a* religion?
- How did religion, at least the way we popularly define it today, come into being?
- Are people naturally religious, in one form or another?
- What is the function or purpose of religion?
- Are all religions basically the same? Can there be one “true” religion?
- Can one theory account for all religious traditions or only individual ones?
- Can (or should) religion/religions be explained, or only described and experienced?
- Is belief in a higher power or the supernatural necessary for someone to be religious?
- Is belief or membership in a religious tradition/group a prerequisite for understanding or describing it?
- Can or should scholars be neutral observers or serve as religious or cultural critics in the public arena?
- Can one study their own religion objectively?
- Does it make sense to speak of “fake,” “pseudo,” or “inauthentic” religions?
- What do people mean when they say I’m spiritual, but not religious?

REQUIRED TEXTS

Required readings are available on OAKS. It is your responsibility to access and print out the relevant reading material *before* each class. Please plan this far enough in advance so as to avoid coming to class without the reading because of computer, printer, financial, relationship, or canine/feline problems.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Mid-Term exam (15%) and Final exam (20%). 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 should call me at my office (leave a detailed voice mail if I am not available). 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 10% of your grade and the second 15%). During the course of the term, you will view two documentary films (see Schedule for dates) and will write a short paper (3-4 pages) that applies various theories (discussed in class) 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 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,” outfitted with staff and cosmetic lunch box. I will arrange for an evening showing of the film (the documentary is also available on Netflix).

Reflection Cards (15%). Over the course of the term, you are required to turn in a total of 12 cards (starting the second week of class, roughly one card per week). One card covers one reading (*please number each card* to keep track of how many you’ve done); eight of these should be turned in by Spring Break. (I will not accept multiple cards in class, especially toward the end of term, to make up for missed ones.) 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 reflection or question 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 would 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*; thus you must attend class to receive credit for your card on that day’s reading. Unless otherwise stipulated, email submissions are *not* acceptable, i.e., do not send me your question and skip class. Exceptions to these policies are possible only in cases of severe illness or other grave circumstances. In each case, suitable documentation is required.

Class Participation and Attendance (10%). This is not a lecture class where you sit for 75 minutes and listen to me yak endlessly about how batshit crazy Freud was (ok, I may mention that from time to time). Rather, class is largely discussion based, addressing questions over readings given to you beforehand and issues raised in your reflection cards. You are required to attend class and, most importantly, participate in discussions of the readings and films. 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. **I will assume that you have read the relevant materials before coming to class and will not summarize their content, although I will (where necessary) provide background information prior to our discussion of the reading(s) for that day.** I may 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 determined on the basis of the quality and consistency of your involvement in class discussions. In order to promote participation, I will divide the class into three groups (designated A, B, and C), with each group responsible for a specific day’s readings and discussion. I will note in class the participation of students in each group and

will announce beforehand which group is up for that day. This does not mean, however, that you can skip class or remain silent if you are not part of that day's group – only that I expect you to make a clear effort to participate in discussion on the day assigned for your group.

You are permitted a total of **THREE** free absences over the course of the term (you need not provide documentation for these). I strongly suggest you save these absences for illnesses or emergencies. Each absence past the allowed three will result in a 5 point deduction in your final grade for the course (8 or more absences results in an automatic withdrawal). Also, 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.

TECHNOLOGY POLICY

Use of laptops or other electronic equipment is not permitted in the classroom. You are required to print out and have in hand the relevant assigned reading(s) from Oaks for each class. I will announce beforehand (in class or via email) what readings will be discussed in class (and also provide discussion questions). Smart phone use (texting, etc.) is strictly prohibited; all phones should be set on silent (not vibrate) or turned off and *not on your desk*. If I see you continually staring at your crotch and smiling, I will assume you have a phone (if not, I don't want to know).

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION

If you have a documented disability and have been approved to receive accommodations through the Center for Disability Services/SNAP (Students Needing Access Parity), please come and discuss this with me as soon as possible during my office hours or by appointment (bring documentation). Students approved for accommodations are responsible for notifying me *at least one week* before accommodation is needed.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES: The Center for Student Learning (CSL)

The CSL, located on the first floor of the library, offers a wide variety of tutoring and other academic resources that support many courses offered at the College. Services include walk-in tutoring, by appointment tutoring, study strategies appointments, Peer Academic Coaching (PAC), and Supplemental Instruction (SI). All services are described on the CSL website (<http://csl.cofc.edu>) or call 843.953.5635 for information.

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 humanities area under study and interpret that material in writing assignments.

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

HONOR CODE POLICY

Please read this sheet (handed out in class) carefully, sign/date it, and return it to me in class no later than Wednesday, January 17.

GRADING SCALE

Final grades are determined in accordance with the following scale:

A = 100-94	C = 75-73
A- = 93-90	C- = 72-70
B+ = 89-86	D+ = 69-66
B = 85-83	D = 65-62
B- = 82-80	D- = 61-59
C+ = 79-76	F = 58-

COURSE SCHEDULE

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

Introduction

Jan. 8 - **Overview of course; the problem of definition (handout with definitions)**

Religion as an Academic Discipline

Jan.10 and 17: **Gaining Perspective, Historical and Otherwise**

Miner, "Body Ritual among the Nacirema" (Oaks #1)

W. Arnal, "Definition" (Oaks #2)

J. Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious" (#3)

D. Lopez, "Belief" (#4)

M. Stausberg, "Can I be spiritual but not religious?" (#5)

G. Bullard, "The World's Newest Major Religion: No Religion" (#6):

<https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/04/160422-atheism-agnostic-secular-nones-rising-religion/>

M. Graziano, "Who are the 'Nones' and why are they so important?" (#7)

Jan. 22-24: **Locating the Academic Study of Religion**

S. Gill, "The Academic Study of Religion" (#8)

R. McCutcheon, "More than a Shapeless Beast. . ." (#9)

B. Lincoln, "Theses on Method" (handout)

Jan. 29-31: **Locating the Scholar of Religion: Insiders and Outsiders**

R. Orsi, "Snakes Alive: Religious Studies between Heaven and Earth" (#10)

S. Prothero, "Belief Unbracketed: A Case for the Religion Scholar to Reveal More of Where He or She is Coming From" (#11)

Responses to Prothero (note especially Orsi and Chidester - #11a)

J. Cabezón, "Identity and the Work of the Scholar of Religion" (#12)

R. King, "Can one Study one's own Religion Objectively?" (#13)

The Quest for Origins and Orientation

Feb. 5: **Frazer on Magic, Religion, and Science**

Frazer, "Sympathetic Magic," "Magic and Religion," etc. (#14)

R. Ackerman, "Frazer, James G." (From on-line reference work, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, available via CofC library databases)

Feb. 7: **Müller: Creating a "Science of Religion"**

Müller, "A Science of Religion," "The Comparative Study of

Religions,” and “Religions and Language” (#15)
J. Stone, “Müller, F. Max” (EncRel on-line)

Explaining Religion as a Psychological and Social Phenomenon

Feb. 12-14: **Freud - Religion as Childhood Neurosis (and how to grow out of it)**

Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (#16)

Brief biography of Freud (#16a)

J. Samuel Preuss, “Psychogenic Theory: Sigmund Freud” (#17)

Feb. 19-21: **Durkheim - Society as the Soul of Religion**

Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (selections; #18a-d)

“ ”, “Religious Sentiment at the Present Time” (#19)

I. Strenski, “Durkheim, Émile” (EncRel on-line)

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

Useful info: <http://web.archive.org/web/20060830052426/religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/Snakes.html>

S. Schwartz, “A Gift of the Holy Spirit” (#20)

J. Birckhead, “Reading ‘Snake Handling’: Critical Reflections” (#21)

Religion in Ritual and Symbol

Feb 28: **Turner - Living on the Edge**

V. Turner, “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites of Passage*” (#22)

*****March 5 - MID-TERM EXAM*****

Ritual and Symbol con’t.

March 7: **J. Z. Smith - Ritual as Imaginative Work**

Smith, “The Bare Facts of Ritual” (#23)

I Wanna be an Insider: Religious and Cultural Appropriation

March 12: Short Film: “White Shamans, Plastic Medicine Men”

M. Johnson, “Wanting to be Indian...” (#24)

Aldred, “Plastic Shamans and Astro turf Sun Dances” (#25)

*****March 14 - Holy Ghost paper due in class*****

Case Study #2 - Film (March 14): “The Devil’s Playground” (2002)

*****March 19-21 – SPRING BREAK*****

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, #26)

Alles, "Otto, Rudolf" (EncRel on-line)

March 28--April 2: **Eliade - The Sacred ("the real") Irrupts into Our Profane World**

Eliade, "Introduction," "Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred," and

"Myths=Paradigmatic Model" (from *The Sacred and the Profane*) - #27a-b

J. M. Kitagawa, "Eliade, Mircea" and B. S. Rennie, "Eliade, Mircea [Further Considerstions]" (EncRel on-line)

*****April 4 - Devil's Playground paper due in class*****

Martians and Beer: Experience as a Problematic Phenomenon

April 4: R. Sharf, "Experience" (#28)

Mythic Maps: Contextualizing the Sacred

April 9: J. Z. Smith, "Map is Not Territory" (#29)

Religion in a Feminist Mode: Moving Beyond Dead White Males

April 11-16: R. Shaw, "Feminist Anthropology and the Gendering of Religious Studies" (#30)

R. Gross, "Defining Feminism, Religion, and the Study of Religion," from her *Feminism and Religion: An Introduction* (#31)

K. Young, "Having your Cake and Eating it Too: Feminism and Religion" (#32)

The Scholar of Religion as Public Intellectual

April 18-23: McCutcheon, "A Default of Critical Intelligence: The Scholar of Religion as Public Intellectual" (#33)

P. Griffiths, "Some Confusions about Critical Intelligence: A Response..." (#34)

J. O'Connor, "The Scholar of Religion as Public Intellectual: Expanding Critical Intelligence" (#35)

McCutcheon, "Talking Past Each Other: The Issue of Public Intellectuals Revisited" (#36)

*****FINAL EXAM - April 30 (Monday) @ 12:00 - 2:00*****

*****April 26 (Thursday) - Kūmārē papers due in my office no later than 4:00pm*****