Dr. John Huddlestun
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Office Hours: M 12:00-2:00, TR 1:45-2:45 (or by appointment)
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COURSE DESCRIPTION:
Since its inception, the discipline of religious studies has struggled in its attempts to address both the
meaning of and interrelationships among the three central topics of myth, ritual and symbol. In this
course, we can do no more than scratch the surface, as it were, of the rich and variegated history of this
academic discussion and debate (with less focus on the history of the debate, thus fewer dead European
white males). Drawing from the vast literature in religious studies, anthropology (cultural and symbolic),
and sociology, we will address a number of concerns across a range of religious, social, and political
situations. What is the place of myth, ritual, and symbol in human social life? Do myths or symbols
reflect reality, or create it? Do myths or symbols have universal meaning? Do rituals simply reflect one’s
belief or worldview or do they create it? Must symbols and rituals always refer to something concrete or
otherwise? Can one have rituals without meaning? What about secular rituals or rituals that fail?
Following a reading of some of the most influential figures (e.g., Eliade, Turner, Geertz) and selected
responses to their work, we will focus on some theoretical issues of ritual, and, finally, on how myth,
ritual, and symbol are created, used (or abused), revised and given authority in modern life (e.g., birth,
death, circumcision, abortion, political contexts) and ways in which they legitimate or reinforce existing
religious and socio-political institutions.

REQUIRED TEXTS:
Readings on Electronic Reserves (ER) at the library. These consist of two separate parts: Part I contains
readings indicated on the syllabus schedule up to the time of presentations, while Part II consists of
readings from which students will choose topics for oral presentations. The password for entry to the
readings is ritualrocks.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:
1) Mid-term Essay Exam (20%). This exam consists of passage identification and essays. A study guide
will be distributed prior to the exam. It is imperative that the student notify me in advance if he or she is
unable to attend. You may call me at my office (953-4996) or leave a message via phone at the
Department of Religious Studies (953-5687). Make-up exams, permitted only with a valid excuse, may be
of a greater degree of difficulty than those given in class.

2) Oral Presentation (25%). Students will be given time to peruse the collection of readings on electronic
reserve (Part II) and choose from among these for their presentation. Each presentation will focus on one
or more of these readings. A handout with guidelines for presentations will be provided. All presentations
must be accompanied by an outline to be handed out to the entire class. I strongly encourage students to
speak with me before the presentation (not the day before). Following each presentation, one student (the designated responder) will initiate classroom discussion (critical or otherwise) of the material. If you miss your presentation without an incredibly good excuse (dead or dying), you will receive a failing grade on it. All students are required to read the material relative to each presentation and submit intelligent and informed questions for discussion.

3) Presentation Paper (15%). A write-up, expansion and revision of your oral presentation, taking into account the comments and questions of other students and the professor. These will be due one week after the date of your presentation. Those presenting at the end of term will be given additional time.

4) Final Exam (25%). This exam will cover material over the last half of the term, including the readings for the presentations. A study guide will be distributed outlining the types of questions to be covered. You must take this exam to pass the course.

5) Attendance/Participation (15%). Students are required to attend class and participate in discussions. You are permitted a total of THREE absences, for whatever reason, over the course of the term. Any number greater than this will result in a lowered or failing grade for the course. As for reading assignments and participation in class, I will assume that you have read the texts before coming to class and will not summarize or retell the narratives. Students should expect to be called upon to respond to questions about the readings. In addition, I may give brief writing assignments and/or unannounced quizzes if students are not keeping up with the assigned material; these will also count in my determination of your grade.

GRADING SCALE: Final grades are determined in accordance with the following scale:

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

LECTURE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS
Dates are subject to revision based on enrollment after withdrawal date. Please bring all relevant materials (along with engaged cerebral matter) to class!

I. Introduction - Jan. 8-10, 17

McCUTCHEON, “Myth” (ER, Folder I, #1)
NYE, “Ritual” (ER - Folder, #2)
SEGAL, “Myth and Ritual” (ER #3)
BELL, “Performance” (ER #3a)

Jan. 15 - Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (no class)
II. On the Shoulder of Giants

Jan. 22 - Eliade, “Symbolism of the ‘Centre’” (ER I, # 4)
Jan. 24 - Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System” (ER #5)
  Jan. 29-31 - Turner, “Symbols in Ndembu Ritual” (ER #6) and “Betwixt and Between” (ER #7)
Feb. 5 - Doniger, “Other Scholar’s Myths: The Hunter and the Sage” (ER #8)
Feb. 7 - no class (I’ll be out of town)
Feb. 12 - Doniger, “Other People’s Myths: The Place in the Woods” (ER #9)

III. Broken Poles and Deceptive Birdies (Eliade and Turner Revisited)

Feb. 14 - J. Z. Smith, “In Search of Place” (ER #10)
Feb. 19 - Crapanzano, “Rite of Return: Circumcision in Morocco” (ER #11)

IV. Deconstructing Ritual

Feb. 21 - Staal, “The Meaningless of Ritual” (ER #12)
Feb. 26 - Rappaport, “The Obvious Aspects of Ritual” (ER #13)
Feb. 28 - MIDTERM

***March 5-7 -- Spring Break***

March 12 - J. Z. Smith, “The Bare Facts of Ritual” (ER #14)
March 14 - Grimes, “Ritual Criticism and Infelicitous Performances” (ER #15)

V. Myth, Ritual, and Symbol in the Real World

March 19 - Meyerhoff, “Death in Due Time: Construction of Self and Culture in Ritual Drama” (ER #16)
March 21 - Davis-Floyd, “Ritual in the Hospital: Giving Birth the American Way” (ER #17)
March 26 - Kertzer, “Ritual, Politics, and Power” (ER #18) and Lincoln, “The
Politics of Myth” (ER #19)

March 28 - B. Smith, “Buddhism and Abortion in Contemporary Japan” (ER #20)

VI. Class Presentations (ca. April 2 – 18). A separate schedule will be distributed in class for these after students have chosen their topics. Presentation will focus on two areas: 1) ritual purity, body, and society, with particular emphasis on the book of Leviticus as interpreted by Mary Douglas and response to her work, and 2) myth, ritual, and symbol in the ancient Egyptian temple (temple as cosmos, king as Horus on the throne, temple cult and role of king as mediator, the destruction of chaos in ritual drama, etc.).

April 23 - Conclusion (What did it all mean?)

***FINAL EXAM - May 2, 4:00—6:00pm***