

## **Theory and Method in the Study of Religion**

16:840:501:01

Edwin Bryant

Tuesday 10:55 a.m. – 1:55 p.m. (Double period 2/3)

Loree Bldg, Room 131, Douglass Campus.

Office House Tue 2.00 PM-2.45 PM

### **Course Description**

This course will engage the more prominent theories that have emerged since the Enlightenment that have attempted to explain religious phenomenon in rational terms. These include models rooted in social, psychological, economic, political, orientalist, structuralist, post-modern and post-colonial explanatory paradigms. The course will engage in methodological issues central to the field of Religious Studies stemming from these approaches.

### **Course objectives**

The course is intended to equip students with an exposure to the main theoretical approaches and requisite terminologies that characterize the academic Study of Religion, such that they can engage their own area of interest in a theoretically sophisticated fashion that is in dialogue with the greater field. Students will gain a graduate level understanding of some of the major theoretical models and methods, and some sense of the controversies surrounding them, that characterize the contemporary study of Religion. Students will not only critically engage and analyze these theories and methods, but direct careful attention to the context from which they emerged. Students will be encouraged to engage these approaches in analyzing specific religious beliefs or practices during class discussions and adopt one or more of them in a seminar paper, thus giving them the opportunity to apply them critically to a religious text, belief, or set of practices. Additionally, the paper affords students the opportunity to undertake a research project that should approach the level of sophistication expected for publication in an academic journal. The class presentations on the assigned topics, are aimed at preparing students for participation at future conferences and panels.

### **Course Requirements.**

Students will be required to make weekly presentations on the subject matter, undertake a mid-term exam and two quizzes (more or less corresponding with the different books assigned), and submit a final 15- 20 page paper due during the Reading Period. A paper-writing guide is provided all students containing comprehensive instructions on research paper writing. Students will be assessed and graded as follows: class participation and chapter presentations (10%), mid-term exam (20%); two written tests (20%); and research paper (50%).

### **Required Readings**

Strenski, Ivan, *Thinking About Religion, An Introduction to Theories of Religion*. Blackwell Publishing, 2006

Strenski, Ivan *Thinking About Religion, a Reader*. Blackwell Publishing, 2006

Masuzawa, Tomoko *The Invention of World Religions*. U of Chicago Press, 2005,

King, Richard *Orientalism and Religion*. Routledge, 1999

**Additional Recommended Readings:**

Pals, Daniel *Eight Theories of Religion* New York: Oxford U Press, 2006

McCutcheon, Russell *Manufacturing Religion* New York: Oxford U Press, 2003

Said, Edward *Orientalism* New York; Vintage, 1978.

Freud, Sigmund *The Future of an Illusion* New York: Classic Book House 2009.

Eliade, Mircea *The Sacred and The Profane* Orlando: Harcourt, 1959

Durkheim, Emile *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* New York: Oxford University Press, 2001

Weber, Max *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* London: Penguin, 2002

**Week I****Tue Sept 3<sup>rd</sup>**

Introduction to the Course

**Week II****Tue Sept 10<sup>th</sup>****Readings:**

*Thinking About Religion, An Introduction to Theories of Religion*, chapters 1-2.

*Thinking About Religion, a Reader*, chapters 1-2

Prehistory of the Study of Religion: Naturalism and the critique of Religion. Cherbury, Hume, Renan, Spinoza.

**Week III****Tue Sept 17<sup>th</sup>****Readings:**

*Thinking About Religion, An Introduction to Theories of Religion*, chapters 3-4.

*Thinking About Religion, a Reader*, chapters 3-4

Classic nineteenth century theorists: Max Müller, and Origins; Edward Tylor and ‘the Savage,’ Whitney.

**Week IV****Tue Sept 24<sup>th</sup>****Readings:**

*Thinking About Religion, An Introduction to Theories of Religion*, chapters 5-6.

*Thinking About Religion, a Reader*, chapters 5-6

Classic nineteenth century theorists (cont): William Smith, Evolution and the Bible; James Fraser and Salvation.

## **Week V**

**Tue Oct 1<sup>st</sup>**

### **Readings:**

*Thinking About Religion, An Introduction to Theories of Religion*, chapters 7-8.

*Thinking About Religion, a Reader*, chapters 7-8.

Classic Twentieth Century Theorists: Phenomenology, Max Weber and economic forces, Kristenson, Malinoski, Otto, Ninian Smart, Hook, Davis.

## **Week VI**

**Tue Oct 8<sup>th</sup>**

### **Readings:**

*Thinking About Religion, An Introduction to Theories of Religion*, chapters 9-10.

*Thinking About Religion, a Reader*, chapters 9-10

Classic Twentieth Century Theorists (cont): Freud and the psyche; Malinowski and the ‘sublime folly’ of Religion, Levi-Strauss, Stocking Jr.

## **Week VII**

**Tue Oct 15<sup>th</sup>**

### **Readings:**

*Thinking About Religion, An Introduction to Theories of Religion*, chapters 11-13.

*Thinking About Religion, a Reader*, chapters, 11-12.

Classic Twentieth Century Theorists (cont): Durkheim and Religious Sociology; Alun Jones  
Mircea Eliade; Rennie, Conclusion.

## **Week VIII**

**Tue Oct 22<sup>nd</sup>**

### **Readings:**

*The Invention of World Religions*, chapters 1-2. Religion before World Religion;’ Comparative Theology. **Mid-Term Exam.**

## **Week IX**

**Tue Oct 29<sup>th</sup>**

### **Readings:**

*The Invention of World Religions*, chapter 3-6. Birth Traumas of a new discipline, Buddhism as a ‘World Religion,’ Philology, the European past and Islam as Semetic Religion.

## **Week X**

**Tue Nov 5<sup>th</sup>**

### **Readings:**

*The Invention of World Religions*, chapter 7-9. Max Müller and classification; Transition into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century; Hegemony, Troeltsch and European Universalism.

**Week XI**

**Tue Nov 12<sup>th</sup>**

**Readings:**

*Orientalism and Religion*, chapter 1-3. Geneologies of Definitions; Disciplining Religion; Sacred texts, hermeneutics and World Religion. **Test I.**

**Week XII**

**Tue Nov 19<sup>th</sup>**

**Readings:**

*Orientalism and Religion*, chapter 4-6. Orientalism; the Myth of Hinduism; Vedanta and the Politics of Representation.

**Week XIII**

**Tue Nov 26<sup>th</sup>**

There is no class this week, due to the substitution of Thursday classes for Tuesday classes, but students are still expected to do the assigned readings

**Readings:**

*Orientalism and Religion*, chapters 7-9. Orientalism and the Discovery of Buddhism; privatization, Hinduism and Mysticism; Religion and Comparativism in the post-Colonial Era.

**Week XIV**

**Tue Dec 3<sup>rd</sup>**

**Readings:**

*To be determined. Test II.*

**Week XV**

**Tue Dec 10<sup>th</sup>**

**Conclusory Reflections and paper presentations. Papers due during Reading period.**