

Religion 3000: Studying Religion: Theories and Methods

Spring, 2015
T/Th, 2:00-3:15pm
Hardin 235

Instructor

Dr. Benjamin L. White (Assistant Professor of Religion)

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Office Hours

Coffee Break: Tuesdays (11:00am-noon). Starbucks, University Union.

Traditional Office Hours: Tuesdays (1:00-2:00pm and 3:30-4:30pm) and Thursdays (11:00am-noon and 1:00-2:00pm). Feel free to stop in and chat or email me and we can set up a specific time to meet.

Course Description and Student Learning Outcomes

Catalogue Description: "Religion 3000 is a discussion- and presentation-based seminar in which students read the writings of the great theorists of religion since the eighteenth century. Social-scientific, phenomenological, and cultural approaches to the study of religion will be explored. Basic methodologies and tools for studying religion will also be introduced."

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- 1) demonstrate basic research skills for the discipline of religious studies;
- 2) analyze and critique how a variety of prominent thinkers have approached and defined religion;
- 3) identify the fields of knowledge relevant to the academic study of religion;
- 4) develop their own definition of religion;
- 5) produce evidence of high ethical standards for research and writing; and
- 6) increase critical thinking skills.

Thinking Critically About Religion

Religion 3000, at least when I teach it, is a Clemson Thinks² course. This means that it is one of a number of courses at the university specifically designed to help increase your critical thinking abilities. Critical thinking is, basically, "thinking about thinking." Throughout the course, and in a number of ways, we will try to be explicit as possible about your thinking processes – your ability to interpret, explain, analyze, infer,

evaluate, deduce, and induce. We will be thinking critically about “religion.” All of the assignments (except for the daily quizzes) are meant to increase your ability to think critically about human religiosity. But critical thinking skills are transferrable from subject to subject and the university is interested in developing consistent pedagogical methods for increasing student proficiency in this area, so, in addition to the assignments that you will do for a grade in this course, you will also be taking two 40-45 minute critical thinking exams administered by the university – one at the beginning of the semester and one at the end of the semester. These exams aren’t for a grade – they’re for something much more important – the measurement of whether or not Clemson is delivering on the intellectual virtues that it has promised to cultivate in you.

Now, just a few introductory words about the academic study of religion and my approach to it. This course does not presuppose commitment to a particular religion. In fact, I’ve found that non-religious students sometimes do the best in a course like this, where religion is being treated as a subject for critical analysis (as if was a natural phenomenon, a piece of literature, a material find, etc.). In fact, one of our first tasks in the course will be to distinguish religious studies from theology. Asking analytical questions of human religiosity is a delicate matter and I have found that the most fruitful conversations about religion result from a classroom atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable in sharing their own personal views without fear of disrespect from others. To that end, it will be our collective goal to ensure that everyone’s views about religion are respected even if and when we don’t personally agree. “Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger,” as one early Christian writer put it (James 1.19). Further, one of the aims of the course is to help each of you develop and give voice to intelligent and persuasive arguments for your views. If we wrestle over ideas and not with one another, our discussions won’t become personal.

In this course, my own role as the instructor is to guide us all toward the production of knowledge. While I am the “professor,” I am also a lifelong “student” just like you. I just have a running head start! I look forward to the critical perspectives each of you will bring to the course and the unique character that this mix of students will take on. Every time I “teach,” I also learn something new about myself, my students, and about how religion looks from a different perspective. The course will involve a lot of “participation-style” active learning where you produce knowledge through reading, writing, discussion, workshops, projects and debate. This is not just a sneaky way of me passing off work to you, but is in my opinion the best way to get students to engage the subject matter of the course.

Honor Code

“As members of the Clemson University community, we have inherited Thomas Green Clemson’s vision of this institution as a ‘high seminary of learning.’ Fundamental to this vision is a mutual commitment to truthfulness, honor, and responsibility, without

which we cannot earn the trust and respect of others. Furthermore, we recognize that academic dishonesty detracts from the value of a Clemson degree. Therefore, we shall not tolerate lying, cheating, or stealing in any form.” (Undergraduate Catalogue)

I expect that you understand the university’s Academic Integrity Policy and the procedures available to me, as a faculty member, if I have evidence of academic dishonesty. Academic integrity is at the heart of both intellectual and moral formation. Misrepresenting your ability and work-ethic is neither beneficial to you nor to our academic community. I am invested in your progress as a student and can only assess your progress if I can see where you struggle.

For the purposes of this course, adhering to the Academic Integrity Policy means that a student neither gives nor receives aid on a quiz or exam and is the sole author of any written work submitted for credit. Pasting material from the internet into a paper without proper citation, for example, is a violation of the honor code. So is paying someone over the internet to produce an assignment for you. Students may form study groups in order to prepare for tests and are permitted to discuss their papers with one another prior to submission. On occasion a group project might be assigned that will result in a jointly authored final report.

Attendance and Electronics Policy

“The academic resources of Clemson University are provided for the intellectual growth and development of students. Class attendance is critical to the educational process; therefore, students should attend scheduled courses regularly if they are to attain their academic goals . . . A student with an excessive number of absences may be withdrawn at the discretion of the course instructor.” (Undergraduate Catalogue)

For the purpose of this class, “excessive number of absences” is equal to one-third or more of the total class meetings. On the other hand, if I am more than fifteen (15) minutes late and have not sent a message to class, you may leave without penalty.

**Cell-phones and laptops are prohibited from use in this class. Please take notes with pencil and paper and silence your phones in your book bags. Students who use electronic devices in class will be asked to leave. The merits of hand-writing notes (for their “desired difficulty”) have been well studied:

<http://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2014/05/24/taking-notes-bring-pen-skip-computer/e3kGp47M7znyaNKOamUwrO/story.html>.

Disability Statement

It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities. Students are encouraged to contact Student Disability Services to discuss their individual needs for accommodation.

Students should then present the proper documentation to the professor during the first two weeks of class and discuss their needs so that proper accommodation may be worked out.

Required Texts and Readings

Pals, Daniel L. *Nine Theories of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Pals, Daniel L. *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Vindication of Tradition: The 1983 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

Pieper, Josef. *Tradition: Concept and Claim* (trans. E.C. Kopff; Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2010 [1970]).

**Other required readings will be provided on Blackboard (noted as “BB” below)

Course Work, Assignments and Grading

For each class period (1.5 hour), I expect a *minimum* of three hours of concentrated out-of-class preparation in order to be successful in meeting the goals of the course. The 2:1 ratio of outside:inside class time for an average-difficulty course is an academic tradition: http://www.usu.edu/arc/idea_sheets/pdf/estimate_study_hours.pdf and http://www.umflint.edu/advising/surviving_college. Because our gatherings will be devoted largely to discussion and debate, your performance in the course will be directly related to the amount of “sweat equity” you put in outside of the classroom. All grades are assigned according to the Undergraduate Catalogue.

It is expected that all assignments will be completed on or before the due date, and that examinations will be taken at their regularly scheduled time. Makeup exams and extensions for other work will be granted only in cases of emergency and, in the case of extensions, only in response to a written petition presented in advance of the due date. Other work does not constitute valid grounds for an extension.

Quizzes (15%): There is assigned reading for each class. You will be held responsible for the reading through 3-5 question quizzes at the beginning of each class. The quizzes aren’t meant to trick you or test your ability to memorize every single detail of the reading. If you’ve done the reading in a focused manner, you should do fine. You will accumulate raw quiz points throughout the semester. Those students with the most total quiz points at the end of the semester will

have the highest quiz scores, and everyone else will be graded against these pace-setters.

Participation (10%): Each class period will offer a variety of kinds of discussion. Your participation in these discussions is an important part of your grade in this course. Both quantity and, more important, quality of contributions will be considered. The best way to maximize your participation score is to do the assigned reading in advance of class and come ready to talk about the assigned discussion questions.

Religion in the News (5%): Each student will lead a 10-15 minute class discussion on a current news item of their choice that is in some way related to human religiosity. Dates will be assigned on the first day of class and students will be responsible for picking a story to talk about that particular day, engaging their fellow students with questions and discussion about the story. The story should be shown on the projector.

Field-Work Assignment (15%): Students will conduct an interview (with pre-arranged questions) with someone of a different religion than theirs and write up a short analysis (6-8 pages – double spaced, 12 point font, 1 inch margins) in which they compare and contrast their own views about the questions and those of their interviewee. The assignment will largely be assessed on the student's ability to delineate clearly between the *emic* and *etic* language of their analysis (i.e. – on its polyvocality) (due in the first half of the semester). **Due to me by email in a Word document by 2:00pm on February 17.**

Mid-Term Exam (15%): Essay exam focused on the readings from the first half of the semester. Potential essays will be provided two weeks before the mid-term.

Bibliography Construction Assignment (15%): Students will negotiate with me a clearly defined topic of research (**by March 24**) and develop a properly-formatted and annotated bibliography of primary and secondary sources for that topic. The bibliography should contain 3 primary sources, 2 monographs, 3 articles, and 2 essays (10 total entries). The annotation for each entry must critically assess its value for the chosen topic. **Due to me by email in a Word document by 2:00pm on April 2nd.**

Final Paper (25%): An 8-10 page paper (double spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins) for which students will be asked to produce their own definition of “religion” and to argue for its superiority over several other definitions that we have encountered throughout the semester. This paper will be kept as an anonymous artifact for the Clemson Thinks² program as it continues to assess its ability to train students in critical thinking. Due at the time of our final exam, **Thursday, April 30, 8am**, via email in a Word document.

General Reading Questions

In addition to specific questions that I may provide for each of the course readings, the following questions should be asked by you of each of the major theorists that we cover this semester:

- 1) What is the specific *presenting* question in this text--the primary question the author sets out to answer?
- 2) What is the *main point* of this reading? What is the author's major conclusion?
- 3) Who is the intended audience for the text?
- 4) How would the author define "religion," and what would the author understand as the purpose or value of a "theory of religion"?
- 5) What kind of interpretive approach is used in the text? What specific types of sources, evidence and arguments does the author deploy? How are these types of evidence and argumentation legitimated?
- 6) What are the strengths of this approach? What are its limitations? What is revealed--and hidden--through the use of this methodology?

Schedule

Thursday, January 8th – **Course Introduction**

Frameworks

Tuesday, January 13th – **The Role (Historically) of Theology in the Liberal Arts Tradition**

Reading: John Henry Newman, "Discourse III: Bearing of Theology on Other Knowledge," in *The Idea of a University*, 40-57 (BB)

Assignment: Take initial Critical Thinking test online before class

Thursday, January 15th – **Comparative Religion and Theology**

Reading: *Nine Theories*, 1-13; Max Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop, Volume I: Essays on the Science of Religion*, vii-xxxiii, 1-8, 27-49 (BB)

Tuesday, January 20th – **Thinking Ethically about Religion: Orientalism**

Listening: Interview w/ Edward Said on *Orientalism* (BB)

Reading: Carl Ernst, "Islam in the Eyes of the West," in *Following Muhammad*, 1-36 (BB)

Thursday, January 22nd – **Thinking Ethically about Religion: “World” Religions?**
Reading: Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 1-21, 107-120 (BB)

Challenges

Tuesday, January 27th – **Empiricism and Religion: David Hume (1711-1776)**
Reading: *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “David Hume” (BB); David Hume, *Natural History of Religion*, 134-153 (BB)

Thursday, January 29th – **Empiricism and Religion: David Hume (1711-1776), cont.**
Reading: David Hume, *Natural History of Religion*, 153-185 (BB)

Tuesday, February 3rd – **Materialism and Religion: Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872)**
Reading: *Nine Theories*, 113-131; Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 1-32 (BB)

Thursday, February 5th – **Materialism and Religion: Karl Marx (1818-1883)**
Reading: *Nine Theories*, 131-138; *Introducing Religion*, 143-170

Tradition

Tuesday, February 10th – **The Nature of Tradition**
Reading: Josef Pieper, *Tradition*, 1-35

Thursday, February 12th – **Tradition in Relation to Religion**
Reading: Josef Pieper, *Tradition*, 37-68

Tuesday, February 17th – **Tradition and the Reformation**
Reading: Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition*, 1-40
Assignment: Field-Work Interview due electronically (see above)

Thursday, February 19th – **Tradition as History and Heritage**
Reading: Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition*, 43-82

Approaches

Tuesday, February 24th – **Evolutionary Approaches: Edward Burnett Tyler (1832-1917)**
Reading: *Nine Theories*, 15-27; *Introducing Religion*, 6-35

Thursday, February 26th – **Evolutionary Approaches: James Frazer (1854-1941)**

Reading: *Nine Theories*, 28-44; *Introducing Religion*, 39-58, 62-70

Tuesday, March 3rd – **Mid-Term Exam**

Thursday, March 5th – **Psychological Approaches: Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)**

Reading: *Nine Theories*, 49-76; *Introducing Religion*, 74-89

Tuesday, March 10th – **Psychological Approaches: William James (1842-1910)**

Reading: *Nine Theories*, 185-206; *Introducing Religion*, 173-188

Thursday, March 12th – **Psychological Approaches: William James (1842-1910), cont.**

Reading: *Nine Theories*, 206-225; *Introducing Religion*, 188-203

Tuesday, March 17th – **Spring Break (No Class)**

Thursday, March 19th – **Spring Break (No Class)**

Tuesday, March 24th – **Sociological Approaches: Émile Durkheim (1858-1917)**

Reading: *Nine Theories*, 81-98; *Introducing Religion*, 102-125

Assignment: Bibliography Topic to be negotiated with me before class

Thursday, March 26th – **Sociological Approaches: Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), cont.**

Reading: *Nine Theories*, 98-109; *Introducing Religion*, 125-142

Tuesday, March 31st – **Sociological Approaches: Max Weber (1864-1920)**

Reading: *Nine Theories*, 143-158; *Introducing Religion*, 240-255

Thursday, April 2nd – **Sociological Approaches: Max Weber (1864-1920), cont.**

Reading: *Nine Theories*, 158-182; *Introducing Religion*, 255-270

Assignment: Bibliography Assignment due electronically (see above)

Tuesday, April 7th – **Phenomenological Approaches: Rudolf Otto (1869-1937)**

Reading: *Introducing Religion*, 205-235

Thursday, April 9th – **Phenomenological Approaches: Mircea Eliade (1907-1986)**

Reading: *Nine Theories*, 227-246; *Introducing Religion*, 274-286

Tuesday, April 14th – **Phenomenological Approaches: Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), cont.**

Reading: *Nine Theories*, 246-259; *Introducing Religion*, 287-308

Thursday, April 16th – **Anthropological Approaches: E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1902-1973)**

Reading: *Nine Theories*, 263-283; *Introducing Religion*, 311-325

Tuesday, April 21st - **Anthropological Approaches: E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1902-1973),
cont.**

Reading: *Nine Theories*, 283-290; *Introducing Religion*, 325-340

Thursday, April 23rd - **Anthropological Approaches: Clifford Geertz (1926-2006)**

Reading: *Nine Theories*, 293-321; *Introducing Religion*, 343-362

Thursday, April 30th - **Final Paper and Final Critical Thinking Exam Due (8:00am)**