

**Religious Studies 10:
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION
Spring, 2005**

Tuesday, Thursday: 2:00-3:15

Siskiyou 120

Professor Andrew Flescher, Trinity 247

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Office Hours TTH 3:30-5:30 and by appointment

Course Description

This course introduces students to theories and methods used in approaching the study of religion, while it also explores broad themes in religious thought. Some major questions that it will address are the following: what is religion? are there questions religions characteristically ask? are there characteristic answers? do all religions have a "God" or transcendent force, which believers "believe in"? are there "secular" religions? how do various cultures approach the question of the "religious"? have humans created religion to counter their primal fears about the cosmos in which they find themselves? have they projected their desires onto the cosmos? how do religions deal with the problem of evil and human suffering? how does the plurality of religions affect the truth in religion? what *is* "true" in religion? to what extent is knowing the "truth" about religions a precondition for understanding and describing them? This course addresses these issues through classical and contemporary readings from several disciplinary fields.

This course attempts to address the questions raised above by looking at a *variety* of approaches employed in the discipline of Religious Studies. We will draw from several academic disciplines (e.g. psychological, sociological, historical, anthropological, philosophical, theological) and attempt to give a voice to each. In the process, we will examine the assigned readings very carefully and respond to each of them critically. As such, this course is *highly interactive*. Attendance and class participation are absolutely crucial. You will be expected to play an active role in the discussion, both by asking questions and raising points that emerge from the readings, and by responding to the comments of other students. In order to ground the discussion in the readings, it is of the utmost importance that you *bring the assigned texts with you to class*. We will not be reading a textbook in this class. You have only primary sources, most of which we will read in their entirety. These are difficult texts! Do not despair. While it is likely that you will not understand everything to which you are exposed on first glance, you will become competent conversants in the field of religious studies by the end of the course. I will go out of my way both in class and in office hours to answer any questions you might have throughout the semester.

General Education Course (C-3)

This course meets the general education requirement of area C, section 3. In light of this fact, this course will seek to provide students with readings in primary sources. In addition to this, the course will fulfill not just one but all three of the sub-requirements of area C-3, which include the following: (1) a critical historical reading of the material under study (and involving several centuries of both theistic and non-theistic metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical thought); (2) an analytical study of several major problems in these areas that include reference to the history of these problems; and (3) attention to more than one major artistic, literary, or philosophical figure in relation to a significant issue of either current public or intellectual import (including biographical information, development of the problems dealt with, and critical appraisal of the figures' achievements).

Requirements and Evaluation

10%: Attendance. **Attendance is absolutely mandatory.** Your attendance grade is determined in the following manner---you start with an “A”

1 missed class = B+

2 missed classes = B-

3 missed classes = C

4 missed classes = D+

5 missed classes = F (in entire course, not just attendance grade).

30%: Exam 1 (individual religious experience and the “truth” question: Otto, Freud and Berger): **March 3rd**

30%: Exam 2 (the religious “other” and religious anthropology: Geertz and Orsi): **April 7th**

30%: Exam 3 (two problems for belief in the contemporary era: the problem of evil and religious diversity: Rubenstein, Lewis, and Eck): **May 19th**

Cultural Events

Because this is a General Education course, you will be expected to attend **4 Cultural Events** during the semester. Part of your class participation requirement will be met when you hand in (at the end of the semester) a single document detailing each event you attended in a description of one sentence or more. One of these events may be a current film related to the field of religious studies (I recommend renting either *Jacob's Ladder* or *Magnolia* ... but if you do, prepare to discuss them with me!!). Other events might include PBS broadcasts or documentaries, musical performances, plays, lectures, or a public gathering or festival.

Students with Certified Disabilities

Please notify me of any special need relating to your disability within the first two weeks of the semester. I will make every reasonable effort to facilitate your success in this course. Please note that you may be required to show documentation of your disability.

Books Required for Purchase:

Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of The Holy*
 Sigmund Freud, *The Future of An Illusion*
 Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*
 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*
 Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*
 Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*
 C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*
 Diana Eck, *Encountering God*

Academic Honesty

Cheating/plagiarism constitutes the *worst* possible thing that you can do as a student. It is automatically grounds for failure of the course. More will be said about academic honesty before the first assignment is due.

SECTION I: UNDERSTANDING AND BELIEVING

1/25: Introduction to course: What is Religious Experience?

Part I: The Theological Approach

Rudolf Otto and Universal Religious Experience—A Theological Approach

1/27: “The Mysterious Tremendum”: Belief as “Believing in...”

Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, Chs. 1-6 (pp. 1-40).

2/1: The Numinous and Universal Religious Experience

Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, Chs. 8, 10 (pp. 50-59; 72-81)

2/3: To Understand is to Believe

Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, Chs. 14, 17, 21 (pp. 112-116; 136-142; 175-178)

2/8: Discussion of Otto

Part II: The Anti-Theologians

Freud, Skepticism and Science: The Psychological Approach to Religion

2/10: Is Religion a Fraud? Freud & the Patriarchal Projection

Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (pp. 5-37)

2/15: Freud and Projection Theory

Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (pp. 38-71)

Peter Berger and The Sociological Approach to Religion

2/17: Religion as a Societal Construct

Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, Chs. 1, 2 (pp. 3-52)

2/22: Religion as Affirming and Alienating

Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, Chs.3, 4 (pp. 53-101)

2/24: Sociological and Theological Perspectives: Is Berger an "Anti-theologian?"

Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, Appendices 1 and 2 (pp. 175-185)

3/1: Discussion of Freud and Berger

3/3: Exam I on Section I of Course

SECTION II: "UNDERSTANDING": BRACKETING THE QUESTION OF BELIEF

Part I: Defining Religion

Clifford Geertz and the Anthropological Approach to Religion

3/8: Religion as Systems of Meaning: Towards a Definition of Religion

Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," *The Interpretation of Cultures*, pp.87-125

3/10: Worldview and Ethos: Can There be Secular Religions?

Clifford Geertz, "Ethos, Worldview, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols," *The Interpretation of Cultures*, pp.126-141

Screening, "The Big Lebowski" (Joel and Ethan Coen)

Part II: The Insider/Outsider Dilemma

3/11-3/21: Spring Break (Read Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 142-192)

3/22: The Religious “Other”

Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example," pp. 142-169

Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, “‘Internal Conversions’ in Contemporary Bali,” pp. 170-192

Part III: Looking Past “Meaning”: Religion as a Lived Way of Life

Robert Orsi and the Historical Approach to Religion

3/24: Ritual in Italian Harlem

Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem*, Introduction to 2nd Edition, pp. ix-xxxviii.

3/29: Catholicism on the Streets

Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, Introduction to First edition, pp. xxxix-xlix and Chapters 1-3, pp. 1-74

3/31: No Class: Cesar Chavez Day

continue reading Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, Chapters 4-5, pp. 75-149

4/5: Religion, the Past and the Present: The “Other” Among Us

Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, Chapters 6-8, pp. 150-231

Class Discussion of Geertz and Orsi

4/7: Exam II on Section II of Course

SECTION III: "BELIEVING": SPECIAL PROBLEMS FOR BELIEF IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Part I: Evil as a Problem for Belief in the Contemporary World

Richard Rubenstein, C.S. Lewis and the Problem of Evil

4/12: The Traditional Conception of God as All-Powerful and All-Loving Under Attack

Begin reading Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*, at least Chs.1-2 (pp. 3-28).

4/14: The Holocaust as a Challenge to Belief and one Modern Jewish Response

Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*, Chs. 8-10 (pp.157-209)

4/19: God as All Powerful?

Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*, Chs. 12-13; 16 (pp. 234-265; 293-306)

4/21: Grief as a Challenge to Belief and one Modern Christian Response

C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

4/26: God as All Loving?

C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (finish)

4/28: Discussion of Richard Rubenstein and C.S. Lewis

**Part II: One Truth or Many: Religious Diversity as a Problem for
Belief in the Contemporary World**

Diana Eck and The Problem of Religious Pluralism

5/3: Our Ever Expanding World: The Discovery of Religious Diversity

Diana Eck, *Encountering God*, Chs. 1-2. (pp. 1-44)

5/5: Religious Diversity and "God": The Same Name in Different Languages?

Eck, *Encountering God*, Chs.3-6 (pp. 45-165)

5/10: Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism

Diana Eck, *Encountering God*, Chs. 7-8 (pp. 166-231)

5/12: Discussion of Eck and Religious Pluralism

5/19: Exam III on Section II of Course