HREL 30100: Introduction to Religion and the Human Sciences

Autumn Quarter 2007
M/W 10:00-11:20
Swift Hall Room 106

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Office Hours: Mon & Tues 1:30–2:30

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Course description:
This course is intended to give MA students in the Divinity School a glimpse of the history of the development of the “scientific” study of religion in the modern period, and to introduce a range of perspectives and methods employed in contemporary practice.

The first half of the quarter will be devoted to analyzing two styles of approach to this study: what have been called the “naturalistic” and the “phenomenological.” These two roughly correspond to a) the impulse to explore religious phenomena as of a piece with (or, in a stronger form, “reducible to”) other cultural and social phenomena for which established disciplinary frameworks are sufficient, and b) the impulse to consider religion as distinct in a special way (what is sometimes called *sui generis*) and thus requiring a unique disciplinary framework for its proper study. An issue in the background here, of relevance to the concerns of the MA sequence, is: to what extent is the study of religion a discrete and/or unitary field of study?

This latter question will be carried over to the second half of the course, which will consist of a series of guest lectures by faculty from the Religion and the Human Sciences Committee. Each lecturer will present one aspect or approach representative of work today in the humanistic and social scientific study of religion, frequently drawing from their own work.

Requirements include: a) active (or at least attentive) participation in both the semi-weekly lecture/discussion meetings and the weekly TA discussion sections, b) completion of two open-book, self-timed take-home exams in which themes from the readings and presentations will be explored.

PQ: Open only to Divinity School MA/AMRS students

All readings will be available on reserve: principally electronic, but also regular in Regenstein Library.

Schedule of Meetings

Part One: Propædeutic

24 September 2007: Orientation/Historiography of the Modern Study of Religion (Its “Pre-history”)
Topics: syllabus, course aims and structure; Prehistory of the Modern Study of Religion
Readings: Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History*, pp. 1–26 (recommended)

26 September 2007: Founders (Naturalism): David Hume
Readings: Hume, *Natural History of Religion* (entire)
1 October 2007: Founders (Phenomenology): F. Max Müller
   Readings: Müller, Introduction to the Science of Religion, pp. 1–82

Part Two: Naturalism

3 October 2007: Animism and Ritual Praxis
   Readings: Tylor, Primitive Culture, pp. 1–25
              Robertson-Smith, Lectures on the Religion of the Semites, pp. 1–27

8 October 2007: Durkheim & the Sociology of Religion
   Readings: Durkheim, Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, pp. 13–63

10 October 2007: Leuba & the Psychology of Religion
   Readings: Leuba, A Psychological Study of Religion, pp. vii–x, 3–54 and “Appendix” (pp. 339–361)

Part Three: Phenomenology


17 October 2007: Otto and van der Leeuw (early 20th cent. Religionswissenschaft)
              van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation, pp. 671–695

22 October 2007: Wach, Eliade and the “Chicago School” (late 20th cent. Religionswissenschaft)
              Wach, “The Problem of Truth in Religion”
              Eliade, “History of Religions and a New Humanism”
              Eliade, “Foreword” to Shamanism

Part Four: Postpædeutic

24 October 2007: Discussion: Unity, Plurality, and the Scientific Study of Religions
   Readings: Fitzgerald, The Ideology of Religious Studies, pp. 3–32
     *Mid-term examination distributed*

Part Five: Contemporary Iterations

29 October 2007: Semiology of Religious Ritual and Scripture (Christian Wedemeyer)
   Readings: Wedemeyer, “Beef, Dog and Other Mythologies”
     *Mid-term examination due at the beginning of class*

31 October 2007: Defining, Understanding, and Explaining Religion (Martin Riesebrodt)
   Readings: Riesebrodt, “Religion in Global Perspective”

5 November 2007: TBA (Steven Collins)
   Readings: TBA
7 November 2007: Liturgy, Art, and Aesthetics (Robert Bird)
Topics: Definition & defense of the icon; Orthodox Christian aesthetics & modern art; the role of narrative
           Pavel Florensky, "The Trinity-St. Sergius Monastery and Russia"
           Robert Bird, “Canonizing Andrei Rublev”
Viewings: "The Face Not Made by Human Hands"
           Andrei Rublev, "Old Testament Trinity"
           Simon Ushakov, "Old Testament Trinity"
           Kuz’ma Petrov-Vodkin, "Trinity"
           Pavel Filonov, "The Three"

12 November 2007: Contemporary Media and the Anthropology of Religion (Richard Fox)
Topics: Religion and the Idea of ‘Terrorism’
Readings: Fox, “Strong and Weak Media”

14 November 2007: Women, Dogs, and Other Subalterns in the History of Hinduism (Wendy Doniger)
Readings: Doniger, “Introduction” to An Alternative Narrative of the Hindus

19 November 2007: Anthropology and Sociology of Religion (Malika Zeghal) [AAR Meeting]
Topic: The sociology of religious institutions and intellectuals: the example of Islam.
Readings: Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind chapter 1
           Roy, The Failure of Political Islam, chapter 6
           Zeghal, “The Recentering of Religious Knowledge and Discourse”

21 November 2007: Analysis of Narrative and the Study of Religion (Rick Rosengarten)
Readings: William Carlos Williams, “The Use of Force”
           White, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality”
           Schafer, “Narration in the Psychoanalytic Dialogue”

26 November 2007: Literary Critical Methods in the Study of Religion (Michael Murrin)
Topics: How does/can one distinguish between literary criticism and scholarship on religion?
Readings: Murrin, “Athena and Telemachus”

28 November 2007: Concluding discussion; final exam distributed

** Final, take-home exam due Monday 3 December at 3:00PM in Swift 204 **
Bibliography


Collins, Steven. TBA


Florensky, Pavel. "The Trinity-St. Sergius Monastery and Russia" (pdf).


Williams, William Carlos. “The Use of Force” (pdf)

