



REL 101: Introduction to Religion

(Fall 2019, Block 2)

MTWR 12:00 pm- 3:00 pm, F 10:00 am- 12:00 pm
South Hall 10

Professor: Jeremiah J. Bowden

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Office Hours: MTR 4-5pm Prall 102

Coffee and Conversation: Wednesdays 10:00-11:30am Zamora's Cafe

I will hold regular office hours after class from 4:00-5:00pm MTR, but please feel free to contact me at any time if you have questions or concerns about the course. The present schedule and/or readings are liable to be amended if necessary. Students are expected to complete a significant amount of work outside of the course which supplements scheduled hours within the classroom and exceeds the government's regulations on course credit equivalency.

Course Description and Learning Outcomes:

What is "religion"? How is it studied and why does it matter? The following course is an introduction to the major classic and contemporary theories and methods in the study of religion. Students will be expected to familiarize themselves with the ways in which scholars of religion have come to understand what religion is and how it functions. This course deals with many controversial topics related to people's deepest held beliefs about God and religion, science, politics and economics, morality and ethics, and social attitudes and cultural assumptions. I hope to challenge you to think about your beliefs in all these areas, and others. My ultimate goal is to teach you *how* to think about these difficult topics, *not what* to think about them. As Jonathan Z. Smith has written, "The disciplined study of any subject is, among other things, an assault on self-evidence, on matters taken for granted, nowhere more so than in the study of religion." Don't be surprised if you finish this course with more questions than when you began; that is a sign that you are wrestling seriously with a complex set of problems.

This course will help students to:

1. Recognize and articulate several influential theories of religion
2. Distinguish a variety of methods employed by scholars to study religion
3. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, and engage with significant debates in the field
4. Effectively utilize the tools of the discipline including journal articles, book reviews, and conference presentations.
5. Craft a coherent research plan and thesis proposal

This course supports the Educational Priorities and Outcomes of Cornell College as follows:

- **Knowledge:** The study of religion is inherently an interdisciplinary task. Students will be surveying multiple disciplinary approaches to the study of religion including historical, philosophical, psychological, sociological, phenomenological, ethnographic, anthropological, evolutionary, and cognitive scientific perspectives utilized in deciphering how religion came about, the role it plays, and understanding what religion is.
- **Inquiry:** Not only will students encounter the variety of interpretive schema mentioned above, but they will also be asked to produce critical analysis to discern the benefits and detriments of differing interpretations and positions.
- **Communication:** Students will enhance their written and oral communication skills through leading daily class discussions, completing written assignments, and presenting their ideas in front of their cohorts. The goal here is to teach students how to engage controversial topics in a rational and coherent manner.
- **Intercultural Literacy:** Students will be asked to identify with, argue on behalf of, and critique a variety of perspectives and positions with which they do not personally identify.
- **Ethical Behavior and Well-Being:** The study of the history and interpretation of religion is an ethical endeavor, and we will encounter a variety of ethical problems throughout the course.

Required Texts:

Daniel L. Pals, *Nine Theories of Religion*, 3rd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). ISBN-13: 978-0199859092 ISBN-10: 0199859094

Daniel L. Pals, *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). ISBN-13: 978-0195181494 ISBN-10: 9780195181494

Suggested Text:

William Strunk Jr., and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*, 4th Edition (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2014). ISBN-13: 978-0205309023 ISBN-10: 9780205309023

Assigned readings outside of the required texts will be uploaded to Moodle. Students are expected to print out these readings and bring hard copies with them to class.

Assessment:

Students will be expected to:

- (1) submit three questions related to the day's readings at the beginning of each class.
- (2) take turns leading daily seminar discussions of assigned readings.
- (3) write at least one short (500-word) analytical paper in response to the day's readings. This will be presented and discussed in class.
- (4) write at least one short (250-word) response to another student's analytic paper (see above) and the relevant text(s). This will also be presented and discussed in class.
- (5) perform one TED Talk style presentation that will be 7-10 minutes in length.
- (6) write one 5 page (1250-word) argumentative (analytical-critical) essay on a topic chosen in consultation with the professor.
- (7) take a final exam covering content from assigned readings, lectures, student presentations, and questions addressed in class.

Other requirements: Daily attendance, reading, and constructive participation.

Attendance and Participation:

Attendance and class participation are required and count toward your final grade. Come to class on time, ready to participate actively. More than two absences will result in an automatic deduction of one's participation grade. Note that this policy makes no distinction between excused and unexcused absences.

Since most of our time together will be spent critically engaging the texts, it is essential for everyone to have read and thought carefully about the assigned material before coming to class. To that end, it will be important for you to create for yourself working conditions that are conducive to concentration and deep thought. Try to find a workspace where you will not be distracted by friends and family, television, Facebook, etc. Map out the main arguments in the reading and be prepared to criticize or defend them.

Once you arrive in class, make an effort to get involved in the conversation. Our goal is collaborative learning. Don't hesitate to ask questions if you need clarification or would like more information: if you are confused, chances are that others are too!

Please turn off and store all cell phones and other electronic devices before entering the classroom. If you use a laptop to take notes, be sure to close all web browsers and other applications.

Late papers will subject to a half-grade deduction per day. For example, an A paper would be marked down to a B+ if turned in two days late. Please let me know of any extenuating circumstances that would prevent you from turning in your paper in a timely manner as these must be made known to me before the due date of the assignment in order to be taken into consideration.

Student Presentations and Discussion:

Everyone is expected to bring to class **three discussion questions** related to the day's readings. Good questions should be open-ended, so as to engender discussion; however, they should be reasonably specific and related to the text, so that discussion does not stray too far afield. These should be typed out, with your name on the sheet. Please bring two copies. These will be collected at the beginning of class and put in a pool of topics for discussion, from which the student discussion leader or I may draw.

You will write at least **one short (500-word) analytical paper** in response to an assigned reading. This should involve a critical analysis of the assigned text(s) and conclude by raising some issues for in-class discussion. It is *not* a research paper: focus on the text at hand. Try to avoid either (a) merely summarizing the reading without critically analyzing it or (b) merely presenting your own ideas, without reference to the text(s). Instead, bring your own critical intelligence and background knowledge to bear on the reading, as you might when, e.g., reviewing a book for a journal. This paper should be typed, double-spaced, and e-mailed to your respondent and me by 8:00 pm the night before your scheduled presentation. Please also make enough copies for everyone else in the class ahead of time and distribute them on the day of the presentation. I would advise you to begin working on this paper in advance of the day in which these readings are assigned.

You will also write at least **one short (250-word) paper** in response to another student's analytical paper. This should raise points of disagreement you may have with what the other student wrote, whether with respect to the student's interpretation of the assigned text(s) or the student's analysis. You can also use the opportunity to defend the original author (of the assigned text(s)) against criticisms raised by the student or to extend the other student's analysis further, or in a different direction. This too should be typed, double-spaced. Please make enough copies of these ahead of time so that you can distribute them to everyone (myself included) in class. After reading your response the student whose paper you are responding to will have the opportunity to respond to any critiques or suggestions you have made. At that point, the discussion will be opened to the rest of the class, and a third student will moderate.

On some third occasion, **you will lead and moderate** such a discussion, asking questions as needed to spur the conversation. You can also draw from the possible discussion questions submitted by the entire class. Given the class size, there may be opportunities for extra credit if more than one presentation or response is given.

Argumentative Essay:

The argumentative essay is intended to prepare students to analyze and critically respond to topics covered in the course. Each paper should be a minimum of 5 complete pages (1250-word minimum), they must be typed, double-spaced, in a standard 12-point font with one-inch margins at the top and bottom of each page and 1.25-inch margins on either side (the default settings in Microsoft Word). Each paper should engage one of the theorists covered in class and utilize a minimum of 6 outside academic sources. Students should reference their selected academic works throughout their papers, demonstrating clearly *not only* that they have read these sources, but that they *understand* them. A grading rubric for written assignments will be provided during our first class period and will be posted in Moodle.

TED Talk:

Each student will be required to prepare a 7-10 minute TED Talk style presentation. A guide for preparing for the presentation and a grading rubric will be posted on Moodle. This information will also be given to the students in hard copy form during the first class meeting. We will also be viewing a number of TED Talks during class to acquaint students with what a successful TED Talk looks like.

Final Exam:

The final exam will contain two sections: the first will include a mixture of multiple choice and short-answer questions taken from course readings, lectures, student presentations, and the daily student questions that have been explicitly covered in class; the second section is comprised of 5 essay questions, 3 of which must be answered by the student – the 5 essay questions will be distributed to the class before the final exam.

Grading:

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| ● Attendance, Participation, and Moderation: | 15 percent |
| ● Short Reading Paper and Presentation: | 15 percent |
| ● Response Paper and Presentation: | 10 percent |
| ● TED Talk: | 15 percent |
| ● Argumentative Essay: | 20 percent |
| ● Final Exam: | 25 percent |

A: 94%–100%	A-: 90%–93%	
B+: 87%–89%	B: 84–86%	B-: 80%–83%
C+: 77%–79%	C: 73%–76%	C-: 70%–72%
Fail: < 70%		

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

Cornell College expects all members of the Cornell community to act with academic integrity. An important aspect of academic integrity is respecting the work of others. A student is expected to explicitly acknowledge ideas, claims, observations, or data of others, unless generally known. When a piece of work is submitted for credit, a student is asserting that the submission is her or his work unless there is a citation of a specific source. If there is no appropriate acknowledgement of sources, whether intended or not, this may constitute a violation of the College's requirement for honesty in academic work and may be treated as a case of academic dishonesty. The procedures regarding how the College deals with cases of academic dishonesty appear in The Catalogue, under the heading "Academic Honesty."

Please be certain that you understand Cornell College's policy on academic honesty and let me know if you have any questions.

Accommodations

Cornell College makes reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities. Students should notify the Coordinator of Academic Support and Advising and their course instructor of any disability related accommodations within the first three days of the term for which the accommodations are required, due to the fast pace of the block format. For more information on the documentation required to establish the need for accommodations and the process of requesting the accommodations, see <http://www.cornellcollege.edu/academic-support-andadvising/disabilities/index.shtml>.

Monday, September 23rd, 2019: Introductions and Syllabus

In-class readings:

Robert Crawford, *What is Religion?* (New York: Routledge, 2002) 1-21.

William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). 16 pages

Michael Stausberg, "There is Life in the Old Dog Yet: An Introduction to Contemporary Theories of Religion" in *Contemporary Theories of Religion: A Critical Companion* ed. Michael Stausberg (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1-21.

Tuesday, September 24th, 2019: Psychology and Religion

Read:

Pals, *Nine Theories*, Chapter 2 "Religion and Personality" (49-80)

Pals, *Introducing Religion*, Chapter 3 "Religion as Neurosis" (71-97)

Wednesday, September 25th, 2019: Marxism

Read:

Pals, *Nine Theories*, Chapter 4: "Religion as Alienation" (113-142)

Pals, *Introducing Religion*, Chapter 5: "Religion as Agent of Economic Oppression" (143-170)

Thursday, September 26th, 2019: Sociology and Religion

Read:

Pals, *Nine Theories*, Chapter 5: "A Source of Social Action" (143-184)

Pals, *Introducing Religion*, Chapter 8: "Religion and Culture Interwoven" (237-270)

Friday, September 27th, 2019: Phenomenology and Religion

Read:

Pals, *Nine Theories*, Chapter 5: "The Verdict of Religious Experience" (185-226)

Pals, *Introducing Religion*, Chapter 6: "The Testimony of Religious Experience" (171-204)

Monday, September 30th, 2019: History and Religion

Read:

Pals, *Nine Theories*, Chapter 7: "The Reality of the Sacred" (227-262)

Pals, *Introducing Religion*, Chapter 9: "Religion as Response to the Sacred" (271-308)

Tuesday, October 1st, 2019: Anthropology and Religion

Read:

Pals, *Nine Theories*, Chapter 8: "Society's 'Construct of the Heart'" (263-292)

Pals, *Introducing Religion*, Chapter 10: "Primitive Religion and Modern Theories" (309-340)

Wednesday, October 2nd, 2019: Cultural Anthropology and Religion

Read:

Pals, *Nine Theories*, Chapter 9: "Religion as Cultural System" (293-324)

Pals, *Introducing Religion*, Chapter 11: "Religion as World-View and Ethic" (341-372)

Thursday, October 3rd, 2019:

TED Talks and Paper Workshop

Friday, October 4th, 2019: Feminism and Religion

Read:

Ivan Strenski, *Understanding Theories of Religion: An Introduction 2nd Edition* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2015) Chapter 16: Sex/Gender and Women: Feminists Theorizing Religion (189-215)

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. "Feminist Theology As a Critical Theology of Liberation." *Theological Studies* 36, no. 4 (1975): 605-26.

Aysha Hidayatullah, "Inspiration and Struggle: Muslim Feminist Theology and the Work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza" in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 25, No. 1, Special Issue: In Honor of Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza (Spring 2009): 162-170

Monday, October 7th, 2019: Post-Colonialism and Religion

Read:

Ivan Strenski, *Understanding Theories of Religion: An Introduction 2nd Edition* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2015) Chapter 17: Another "Otherness": Post-Colonial Theories of Religion (216-240)

Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), (329-354)

William E. Deal and Timothy K. Beal, *Theory for Religious Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 108-112.

Wednesday, October 9th, 2019: Philosophy and Religion

Tuesday, October 8th, 2019: Philosophy and Religion

Read:

John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1989), 1-17.

John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1989), 233-251.

Timothy R. Stinnett, "John Hick's Pluralistic Theory of Religion" in *Journal of Religion*, Vol. 70 Issue 4 (Oct 1990): 569-588.

Wednesday, October 9th, 2019: The New Atheist Response to Religion

Read:

Armin W. Geertz, "New Atheistic Approaches in the Cognitive Science of Religion: on Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell* (2006) and Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (2006) in *Contemporary Theories of Religion* ed. Michael Stausberg (New York: Routledge, 2009), 242-263.

Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 308-339.

Christopher Hitchens, *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 2007), 155-168.

Thursday, October 10th, 2019: Evolution and Religion

Read:

Tina Beattie, "'Religion' in the Writings of the New Atheists" in *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies* ed. Richard King (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 135-143.

Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Bantam Press, 2008), 25 pages.

Joseph Bulbulia and Marcus Frean, "Religion as Superorganism: on David Sloan Wilson, *Darwin's Cathedral* (2002)" in *Contemporary Theories of Religion* ed. Michael Stausberg (New York: Routledge, 2009), 173-194.

David Sloan Wilson, *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 10 pages.

Friday, October 11th, 2019: Research and Writing

NO READINGS – Work on your final essay.

Monday, October 14th, 2019: Cognitive Science and Religion

Read:

Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Human Instincts that Fashion Gods, Spirits and Ancestors* (London: Random House, 2001), 23 pages.

Jeppe Sinding Jensen, "Religion as the Unintended Product of Brain Functions in the 'Standard Cognitive Science of Religion Model': on Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained* (2001) and Ilkka Pyysiäinen, *How Religion Works* (2003) in *Contemporary Theories of Religion* ed. Michael Stausberg (New York: Routledge, 2009), 129-155.

Ilkka Pyysiäinen, "Religion and the Brain: Cognitive Science as a Basis for Theories of Religion" in *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies* ed. Richard King (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 229-235.

Tuesday, October 15th, 2019: Secularization

Read:

Gregory D. Alles, "Religious Economies and Rational Choice: On Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith* (2000) in *Contemporary Theories of Religion* ed. Michael Stausberg (New York: Routledge, 2009), 83-98.

Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 215-241.

Stark, Rodney. "Secularization, R.I.P." *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999): 249-73.

Wednesday, October 16th, 2019:

Final Exam 12:00 - 1:30 pm

Review drafts of final essays 1:30 – 3:00pm (longer if needed)

Argumentative Essay due by noon on Friday, October 18th, 2019.