

Religious Studies 390

Approaches to the Study of Religion

[Joseph Adler](#)

Ascension 312

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Fall 2005

TTh 2:40-4:00

Ascension 120

Office hours: MW 3-4, TTh 1-2:30
and by appointment

This course introduces students to the variety of academic approaches to the study of religion and to the procedures and sources used in writing academic papers in religious studies. We will discuss religious studies as an academic discipline, the phenomenology of religion, history of religion, the sociological and anthropological approaches, the psychology of religion, ecological approaches, feminist theory, and post-modern theory. Some of the major figures we will cover include Müller, Otto, Eliade, Durkheim, Weber, Freud, Jung, Geertz, Turner, and Smart. The course will be conducted in seminar format, and will include visits to the library to become familiar with the sources for the study of religion.

Library Resources Page	Online Resources and Kenyon Journals Page
Paper Format Guide	Important Names and Ideas

Reading:

- Carl Olson, ed., *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion: A Selection of Critical Readings*
- Wilfrid Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*
- Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*
- Additional readings will be put on Course Reserve or distributed in class

Course Requirements and Grading:

1. *Participation* (20% of grade). The seminar format requires regular attendance, completion of reading assignments, and active participation in discussion by all members, every week. Necessary absences must be cleared in advance with the instructor; unexcused absences will result in a grade penalty.
2. *Five abstracts and annotated bibliographies* on potential topics in the study of religion (10% each), each using one of the nine approaches we will cover in the course ([here](#) is a more detailed guide). You may do more than five, in which case only the five highest grades will be counted.
3. *Research paper* (30%), 8-12 pages plus bibliography, on one of the topics for which you wrote an abstract and bibliography. Due **Tuesday, Dec. 20, 4:30 p.m.**, in my office.

Note: If you have a disability that will affect your work or participation in this class, please contact Erin Salva, Coordinator of Disability Services, at PBX 5453 or via e-mail at salvae@kenyon.edu, and speak to me individually, early in the semester, about the arrangements you will need.

COURSE SCHEDULE

- 1 Aug 30-Sep 1 Introduction to the course;
Religious Studies as an academic field**
Read: Olson, ch. 1; ch. 2: pp. 15-20, Smith 25-28, Wiebe 36-41, Miles 42-48
- 2 Sep 6-8 What is "religion"?**
Read: Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, entire
- 3 Sep 13-15 The quest for the origins of religion**
Read: Olson, ch. 3: pp. 49-53, Tylor 54-61, Frazer 61-67, Müller 70-78, Masuzawa 78-84, Lévy-Bruhl 84-91, Smith 95-99
(Frazer's [The Golden Bough online](#))
- 4 Sep 20-22 Resources for the study of religion**
Library visits with Barbara Thompson, Librarian and Technology Consultant (the LBIS liason for the Religious Studies Department)
- 5 Sep 27-29 Phenomenology (or "History") of religion (1)**
Read: Olson, ch. 4: pp. 102 (para.2, Husserl)-106, Otto 107-119, Idinopulos 119-124, van der Leeuw 124-139, Plantinga 139-142, Smart 143-150, Wiebe 150-156
- 6 Oct 4-6 Phenomenology (or "History") of religion (2)**
Read: Olson, ch. 5: pp. 157-160, Eliade 161-172, Shaw 172-174 (skip last two sections)
- << October Break >>**
- 7 Oct 13 Sociology of religion (1)**

Read: Olson, ch. 6: pp. 209-211, Durkheim 212-225

8 Oct 18-20 **Sociology of religion (2)**

Read: Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, pp. xxvii-xxxviii, chs. I-V, IX–XI

9 Oct 25-27 **Anthropology of religion**

Read: Olson, ch. 7: pp. 238-244, Malinowski 245-257, Turner 268-276, Bynum 277-284, Geertz 285-297

10 Nov 1-3 **Psychology of religion (1)**

Read: Olson, ch. 8: pp. 342-353, Freud 353-363, Torgovnick 364-370, Jung 370-374 (plus handout), Goldenberg 374-378

11 Nov 8-10 **Psychology of religion (2)**

Read: Olson, ch. 8: James 378-390, Erikson 393-404

12 Nov 15-17 **Ecological / Biological approaches**

Read: Olson, ch. 9: pp. 439-443, Hultkrantz 444-449, Burkert 450-459, Ruether 459-467, Williams 467-471, Burhenn 471-475

<< Thanksgiving break >>

13 Nov 29-Dec 1 **Feminist approaches**

Read: Olson, ch. 10: pp. 476-482, Daly 482-490, Hewitt 491-496, Christ 497-506, Hewitt 506-510, Gross 511-521, Young 521-530

14 Dec 6-8 **Post-modern approaches**

Read: Olson, ch. 11: pp. 548-557, Derrida 587-591, Rosen 592-595
[John Lye, "Deconstruction: Some Assumptions"](#)

Final papers due by
Tuesday, Dec. 20, 4:30 p.m.,
in my office

Edit date: 7/25/07

