

Dr. Mark Hulsether
Religious Studies 503
University of Tennessee
Fall Semester 2007

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Theory and Method in the Study of Religion

This is the first semester of the core sequence of courses for master's students. It provides an orientation to some of the major analytical frameworks for the academic study of religion. We will explore "classic" approaches such as those of Max Weber, Mircea Eliade, and Clifford Geertz that are foundational for the history of the field. We will also build a "critical toolbox" of analytical skills that are needed to thrive amid current discussions of colonialism, cultural difference, postmodernity, cross-disciplinary study, and the intersection of culture and power.

Working understandings of religion are so diverse, and the range of inquiries pursued in religious studies is so broad, that any focused scholarly project—especially at the graduate level—must close off some conversations and open others. The goals of this course are to map the contemporary academic scene in a way that clarifies this situation, to prepare students to thrive amid current methodological debates, and to help students choose the most productive analytical approaches for accomplishing their goals.

Readings

William Paden, *Interpreting the Sacred: Ways of Viewing Religion*
William Deal and Timothy Beal, *Theory for Religious Studies*
Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an Introduction*
Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Vol. 74 #1: Special Issue on the Future of the
Academic Study of Religion
Supplementary Articles for Religious Studies 503

Recommended reference works:

Mark C. Taylor, ed. *Critical Terms for the Study of Religion*
John Hinnells, ed., *Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*
Charles Lemert, ed., *Social Theory: the Multicultural and Classic Readings*
Michael Payne, ed., *Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*

Expectations and Evaluation:

The major expectations are a careful preparation of common readings, thoughtful participation in class discussion, and the completion of writing assignments designed to encourage active reading, improve the quality of discussion, and provide structure for individual research. In most weeks, students are responsible for preparing question cards on assigned readings, using the format explained on our blackboard site. In addition there are three individual projects, which ideally should build on each other.

In the first project, choose an author treated in the first part of our course (Geertz, Weber, etc.) or in Deal and Beal's *Theory for Religious Studies* (Foucault, Said, etc.). Your task is to explore his/her work in more depth, including studying at least one book (or its equivalent) and

one article by this author. We will schedule classroom presentations on this research. On the day you present, submit at least five pages of written work summarizing your research, using a similar format as the question cards (revised or expanded as necessary.)

In your second project, select a keyword for the study of religion (e.g. gender, secularity, colonialism, ritual practice, etc.) and explore it in greater depth, following the model of essays in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* and the *Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*. In five to seven pages, explain why your keyword is important and address some of the following questions. What are the key trends in the history of scholarship on this topic, especially in recent decades? What authors are most commonly cited in discussions of it? What are some major controversies among scholars in the field? What current trends are most influential, promising, and/or disturbing? Spend about half your effort analyzing the most important readings from our syllabus that bear on your keyword, and the other half pursuing additional research.

Your final paper may expand one of your earlier projects into a 10-15 page seminar paper. However, the preferred option is to write a 10-15 page paper that you can later use (directly or indirectly) in a thesis prospectus. Identify an intellectual problem that you want to research more thoroughly (ideally in a master's thesis) and clarify your background rationale and methodological strategies for addressing it. Your task is not to undertake the research directly, but rather to set priorities among a range of analytical frameworks that could focus and inform such research. After you briefly introduce your topic, the main part of your paper must discuss the strengths and weaknesses—for the purposes of analyzing your topic—of two or three of the major approaches discussed in our class. Explicitly address arguments from our readings, working at whatever degree of abstraction is appropriate; a key criterion separating the top papers from weaker ones will be the nuance, sophistication, and ambition of this aspect of your project. You may *supplement* approaches from our syllabus, but not *substitute for* them, with another theoretical frame of your choice. In general, craft a paper that addresses these questions: What do you seek to accomplish in your research? What concepts, background theories, and research methods will help you reach your goals? How does your project relate to our discussions about the strengths and weaknesses of varying theoretical approaches? What pitfalls do you need to avoid? Have scholars raised objections to your approach that you must refute or evade in order to succeed? Your paper must include a bibliography divided into three sections: works consulted for this paper, works read in the past, and priority works to read in the future.

Late written work is penalized 5% per day. Fully engaged classroom participation is essential, and any unexcused absence will affect your grade. Question cards are due for the readings of each week, even in the case of excused absences. Work is expected to be a step up in quality from UT undergraduate majors in upper level courses. Our workload assumes that the 30 credit hours required for a master's degree, plus a quarter time assistantship, represent a full time work commitment for two years; two implications are that graduates should take approximately half the credit hours per semester normally taken by UT undergraduates, and that you should budget around a quarter of your time (a bare minimum of 10 hours a week) for this course.

Grades are weighted as follows:

Question cards (or alternative assignments as announced)	25%
Overall preparation, attendance, and contribution to discussion	25%
Two individual projects on a selected author and keyword	25%
Final project (including proposal, progress report, rough draft)	25%

Weekly Agenda (may be revised)

8/22 Getting Organized and Thinking about Graduate Studies

Recommended Supplements:

AAUP Report, "An Increasingly Contingent Faculty"
Nelson, "Lessons from the Job Wars"
Bousquet, "The Waste Product of Graduate Education"

8/29 First Thoughts on Defining and Studying Religion

Due at the start of class each week: question cards on readings (use template on blackboard)

Read: Paden, *Interpreting the Sacred*, chapters 1, 7, 8

Chidester, "Church of Baseball" (read with handout prepared by Dr. Hulsether)

MacQueen, "Whose Sacred History?"

Case Study: Tompkins, "'Indians': Textualism, Morality, and History"

Recommended Supplements:

Arnal, "Definition"

Wilson, "Brief History of the Definition of Religion"

Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious" (in *Critical Terms*)

9/5 Paden's "Critical" Approaches

Due: One page statement proposing topics for your three papers

Read: Paden, *Interpreting the Sacred*, chapter 2

Eagleton, chapter on Psychoanalysis from *Literary Theory*

Primary Source: Freud, from *Civilization and Its Discontents*

Primary Source: Marx, from *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*

Case Study: Allen, "Casting Out the Gods from Religious Studies"

Recommended Supplements:

DiCenso, "Religion and the Psycho-Cultural Formation of Ideals"

Williams, selections from *Marxism and Literature*

Turner, from *Cambridge Companion to Marx*

Lincoln, "Theses on Method"

9/12 Sociological Approaches

Read: Paden, *Interpreting the Sacred*, chapter 3

Pals, "Max Weber"

Primary Source: Durkheim, "Ritual, Magic, and the Sacred"

Case Study: Warner, "New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion"

Recommended Supplements:

Weber, from *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

Reisebrodt, "Sociology of Religion (in *Routledge Companion*)

Jakobsen and Pellegrini, "Dreaming Secularism"

9/19 Psychological Approaches

Read: Paden, *Interpreting the Sacred*, chapter four
Jonte-Pace, "Feminist Voices in the Psychology of Religion"
Primary Source: Jung, "Approaching the Unconscious"
Case Study: Friedman, "Why Psychologizing of Myth Precludes the Holocaust"

Recommended Supplements:

James, Selections from *Varieties of Religious Experience*
Merkur, "Religion and Psychology" (in *Routledge Companion*)
Martin, "Religion and Cognition" (in *Routledge Companion*)

9/26 Comparative Religion and Questions about "Insider" Evidence

Read: Paden, *Interpreting the Sacred*, chapter five and six
Primary Source: Eliade, from *Cosmos and History*
McCutcheon and Rennie, exchange on *Reconstructing Eliade*
Case Study: exchange from Martin, *American Indian and the Problem of History*

Recommended Supplements:

Sharf, "Experience," (in *Critical Terms*)
Sharpe, "Study of Religion in Historical Perspective" (in *Routledge Companion*)
Hauerwas, "Surviving Postmodernism"

10/3 Beefing Up Two of Paden's Thin Spots: Geertz and Ritual Studies

Due: Brief progress reports on individual projects. Seek feedback now, because you may not change your author after 10/11, keyword after 10/25, or final project after 11/8.

Read: Pals, Clifford Geertz"

Case Study: Ortner, "Thick Resistance"
Bell, "Performance" (in *Critical Terms*)
Case Studies: Miner, "Body Ritual" and Carnes, "Victorian Fraternal Rituals."

Recommended Supplements:

Geertz, "Thick Description" from *Interpretation of Cultures*
Hackett, "Anthropology of Religion" (from *Routledge Companion*)
Grimes, "Ritual" (from *Guide to the Study of Religion*)
Grimes, chapter on initiation from *Deeply Into the Bone*

10/10 Dr. Hulsether at American Studies Association. No Class, Early Fall Break

Work on projects: we will schedule most author presentations from 10/17 to 10/31.

10/17 Searching for Bearings in the World of Contemporary Culture Theory

Read: Hulsether, "Religion and Culture" (in *Routledge Companion*)
Deal and Beal, *Theory for Religious Studies*: skim the whole, study seven chapters

Recommended Supplements:

Benavides, "Modernity" (in *Critical Terms*)
Masuzawa, "Culture" (in *Critical Terms*)
Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Political Economy"
Bérubé, "Pop Goes the Academy: Cult Studs Fight the Power"

10/24 Eagleton's World I: Classic Textual Approaches and Emerging Critiques

Read: Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, first half
Primary Source: Arnold, from *Culture and Anarchy*
Case Study: Fish, "How to Recognize a Poem When You See One"

Recommended Supplements:

Rowe, "Structure" in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*
Selections from McKenzie and Haynes, *To Each Its Own Meaning*

10/31 Eagleton's World II: Postmodernists, Poststructuralists, and Neo-Marxians

Read: Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, second half
Taylor, "Introduction" (from *Critical Terms*)
Case Study: Loy, "Religion of the Market"

Recommended Supplements:

Conner, "Postmodernism"
King, "Orientalism and the Study of Religion" (from *Routledge Companion*)
West, "New Cultural Politics of Difference"
Chopp, "Christianity, Democracy, and Feminist Theology"

11/7 Mapping Approaches and Choosing Allies Within the AAR, Part One

Due: Paper on your keyword for the study of religion

Read: *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, Volume 74 #1, pp. 1-106.
Beal and Deal, *Theory for Religious Studies*, as needed for background
Additional supplement emerging from course discussions?

Recommended Supplements:

Pursue citations from *JAAR* symposium articles that especially interest you

11/14 Mapping Approaches and Choosing Allies Within the AAR, Continued

Read: *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, Volume 74 #1, pp. 107-211
Beal and Deal, *Theory for Religious Studies*, as needed for background
Additional supplement emerging from course discussions?

Recommended Supplements:

Pursue citations from *JAAR* symposium articles that especially interest you

11/21 *Dr. Hulsether at AAR: Happy Thanksgiving*

11/28 Leftovers? Conclusions? Next Steps?

Due: Rough drafts of final papers; classroom presentations on individual projects.

Read: Possible additional supplements emerging from our discussions

12/13 Due: Revised drafts of final papers

Full Citations for Readings Listed Above

NOTE: All of the required and most of the recommended articles are posted on our blackboard site under “fair use” provisions of copyright law, which implies that you may have one copy for academic purposes but not distribute it further. Please print copies of each article that you read, so that you can underline, make marginal notes, and bring a copy to class.

John Curtis and Monica Jacobs, “Consequences: an Increasingly Contingent Faculty,” research report by the American Association of University Professors, 2006.

Cary Nelson, “Lessons from the Job Wars,” *Social Text* 44 (1995), 119-134.

Mark Bousquet, “The Waste Product of Graduate Education ” *Social Text* 70 (2002), 81-104.

Required:

David Chidester, “The Church of Baseball, the Fetish of Coca-Cola, and the Potlatch of Rock and Roll,” in *Religion and Popular Culture in America* ed. Bruce Forbes and Jeffrey Mahan (University of California Press, 2000), 219-237.

Graeme MacQueen, “Whose Sacred History? Reflections on Myth and Dominance,” *Studies in Religion* 17 #2 (1988), 143-157.

Jane Tompkins, “Indians: Textualism, Morality, and the Problem of History” in *'Race,' Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (University of Chicago, 1986), 59-77.

Recommended:

Brian Wilson, “From the Lexical to the Polythetic: a Brief History of the Definition of Religion,” in *What is Religion? Origins, Definitions, and Explanations* ed. Thomas Idinopolus and Brian Wilson (Brill, 1998), 142-162.

William Arnal, “Definition,” in *Guide to the Study of Religion* ed. Willi Braun and Russell McCutcheon (London: Cassell, 2000), 21-35

Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269-284.

Required:

Terry Eagleton, “Psychoanalysis” in *Literary Theory: an Introduction*, 2nd. edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), chapter five.

Sigmund Freud, from *Civilization and Its Discontents* first published 1930 (Norton, 1961), 21-32

Karl Marx, selection from *Toward the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law* in *Enduring Issues in Religion* ed. John Lyden (Greenhaven, 1995), 26-32.

Charlotte Allen, “Is Nothing Sacred? Casting Out the Gods from Religious Studies,” *Lingua Franca* (November 1996), 30-40.

Recommended:

- James DiCenso, "Religion and the Psycho-Cultural Formation of Ideals" *What is Religion? Origins, Definitions, and Explanations*, ed. Thomas Idinopolus and Brian Wilson (Brill, 1998), 15-25
- Raymond Williams, "Selections from *Marxism and Literature*," in *Culture/Power/History: a Reader in Contemporary Social Theory* ed. Nicholas Dirks, et. al. (Princeton University Press, 1994), 585-608.
- Denys Turner, "Religion: Illusions and Liberation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Marx* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 320-337.
- Bruce Lincoln, "Theses on Method," *Method and Theory in Study of Religion* 8 (1996), 225-27.
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Required:

- Daniel Pals, "Max Weber," *Eight Theories of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 149-92
- Emile Durkheim, "Ritual, Magic, and the Sacred" in *Readings in Ritual Studies* ed. Ronald Grimes (Prentice-Hall, 1995), 188-193.
- R. Stephen Warner, "Work in Progress Toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States" *American Journal of Sociology* 98 #5 (1993), 1044-1093.

Recommended:

- Max Weber, from *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Los Angeles: Roxbury, 1996) 47-78.
- Martin Riesebrodt, and Mary Ellen Konieczny, "Sociology of Religion," *Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John Hinnells (New York: Routledge, 2005), 124-143.
- Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, "Dreaming Secularism," in *World Secularisms at the Millennium*," *Social Text* 64 (18 #3), 2000, 1-27.
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Required:

- Diane Jonte-Pace, "Analysts, Critics, and Inclusivists: Feminist Voices in the Psychology of Religion" in *Religion and Psychology: Mapping the Terrain* (Routledge, 2001), 129-46.
- Carl Jung, "Approaching the Unconscious," *Man and His Symbols* (Dell Publishing, 1964), pp. 1-16, 56-82.
- Maurice Friedman, "Why Joseph Campbell's Psychologizing of Myth Precludes the Holocaust," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66 #2 (1998), 385-401.

Recommended:

- William James, Selections from *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, in *William James: a Comprehensive Edition*, ed. John J. McDermott (New York: Modern Library, 1967), 741-786
- Luther Martin, "Religion and Cognition" *Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John Hinnells (New York: Routledge, 2005),

Dan Merkur, "Psychology of Religion," *Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John Hinnells (New York: Routledge, 2005), 164-181.

Required:

Mircea Eliade, "Ritual and Myth" (from *Cosmos and History*) in *Readings in Ritual Studies* ed. Ronald Grimes (Prentice-Hall, 1995), 194-201.

Russell McCutcheon, Review of Brian Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade, Religion* 28 (1998), 92-97, with rejoinder by Rennie, *Religion* 28 (1998), 413-414.

Exchange from Calvin Martin, ed., *American Indian and the Problem of History* (New York: Oxford, 1987): Martin, "Metaphysics of Writing Indian-White History," 27-34, Henry Dobyns, "Demographics of Native American History," 67-74, Vine Deloria, "Revision and Reversion," 84-91, and Robin Ridington, "Fox and Chickadee," 128-135.

Recommended:

Eric Sharpe, "The Study of Religion in Historical Perspective," *Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John Hinnells (New York: Routledge, 2005), 21-45

Robert Sharf, "Experience," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 94-116.

Stanley Hauerwas, "Surviving Postmodernism: the University, the Global Market, and Christian Narrative," *Soundings* 82 #1-2 (1999), 107-126.

Required:

Daniel Pals, "Clifford Geertz," *Eight Theories of Religion* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), 260-91

Sherry Ortner, "Thick Resistance: Death and the Cultural Construction of Agency in Himalayan Mountaining," from *The Fate of 'Culture': Geertz and Beyond* (University of California Press, 1999), 136-163

Catherine Bell, "Performance," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 205-224.

Horace Miner, "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema," *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956), 503-7.

Mark Carnes, "Victorian Fraternal Rituals," in *Religion and American Culture*, ed. David Hackett (New York: Routledge, 1996), 314-26.

Recommended:

Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1973): 3-30

Rosalind Hackett, "Anthropology of Religion," *Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John Hinnells (Routledge, 2005), 144-163.

Ronald Grimes, "Ritual," in *Guide to the Study of Religion* ed. Willi Braun and Russell McCutcheon (London: Cassell, 2000), 259-270.

Ronald Grimes, "Coming of Age, Joining Up" from *Deeply Into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), chapter two.

Required:

Mark Hulsether, "Religion and Culture," *Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John Hinnells (Routledge, 2005), 489-507.

Recommended:

Gustavo Benavides, "Modernity" in *Critical Terms for the Study of Religion*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 186-204.

Tomoko Masuzawa, "Culture" in *Critical Terms for the Study of Religion*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 70-93 117-135.

Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Political Economy," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, second edition, ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, 1999), 220-230.

Michael Bérubé, "Pop Goes the Academy: Cult Studs Fight the Power" in *Public Access: Literary Theory and American Cultural Politics* (New York: Verso, 1995), 137-160

Required:

Matthew Arnold, excerpts from *Culture and Anarchy*, from *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: a Reader*, ed. John Storey (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 7-12.

Stanley Fish, "How to Recognize a Poem When You See One" from *Is There a Text in This Class? the Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Harvard University Press, 1980), 322-37.

Recommended:

John Carlos Rowe, "Structure," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study* ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, 2nd. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 23-38

Selections from Steven McKenzie and Stephen Haynes, *To Each Its Own Meaning: an Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and their Applications* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1994)

Required:

Mark C. Taylor, "Introduction," in *Critical Terms for the Study of Religion* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1-20.

David Loy, "Religion of the Market," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65 #2 (1997) 275-290

Recommended:

Steven Connor, "Postmodernism," *Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory* ed. Michael Payne (Blackwell, 1997), 428-432.

Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference" in *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America* (Routledge, 1993), 3-32.

Richard King, "Orientalism and the Study of Religion," *Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John Hinnells (Routledge, 2005), 275-290.

Rebecca Chopp, "A Feminist Perspective: Christianity, Democracy, and Feminist Theology," *Christianity and Democracy in Global Context* ed. John Witte (Westview, 1993), 111-129.