

**RLG 6035: Method and Theory I**  
**Fall 2021**  
**Wed. 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> periods, CBD 234**

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Class meets Wednesdays 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> periods (1:55-4:55) in CBD 216

Office Hours: Wednesdays 12:44-1:45 and by appointment.

### **Course Description**

In this seminar, we will reflect upon the modern study of religion, namely, its “method” and “theory.” The bulk of this course will be devoted to the careful reading of several major theories of religion, including sociological, anthropological, psychoanalytical approaches. We will therefore begin the semester by discussing, first, the purpose of theory in religious studies, with a focus on the way theory helps us see patterns and connections within and across traditions, identify and analyze important themes, and understand the way religions operate in the real world. Second, we will establish what it means to construct and evaluate a well-formed theory, including defining a clear and distinct object of study, building arguments based upon empirical evidence, building consistent arguments, and achieving clarity in language. Third, we will consider a variety of different methods used to examine religions and religious phenomena, including textual, archival, ethnographic, and quantitative studies, and the relations between methods and theories.

### **Format**

The seminar is organized around class discussions based on the weekly assigned readings. We will usually read a monograph or several articles per week. Since this is a small advanced seminar, active and engaged participation is required. Students will make presentations and help to lead discussions. There will be no research paper; all papers will focus on the class readings, to encourage you to focus on the readings and think about them comparatively.

### **Required Books**

Bayne, Tim. *Philosophy of Religion: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, 2018.

Comaroff, Jean. *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance*. Chicago, 1985.

Dewey, John. *A Common Faith*. Yale, 1991. Other editions available. Also available online at [https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/uv/uv/UV9406/dewey-john-\(1986\).-essays-a-common-faith..pdf](https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/uv/uv/UV9406/dewey-john-(1986).-essays-a-common-faith..pdf).

Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. New York: Free Press, 1965. Available online at <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/41360>

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane*. New York: Harvest/HBJ Book, 1968.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Future of an Illusion*. New York: Norton, 1989.

Available online at [https://archive.org/stream/sigmund-freud-the-future-of-an-illusion/sigmund-freud-the-future-of-an-illusion\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/sigmund-freud-the-future-of-an-illusion/sigmund-freud-the-future-of-an-illusion_djvu.txt)

William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*. Penguin, 1982. Other editions available. Also available online at <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/621>

Marx, Karl and F. Engels. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. Robert Tucker. New York: W.W. Norton, 1978. Other editions available. Also available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/index.htm>

Weber, Max. *The Sociology of Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.

Available online at <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.6718/page/n2>

Additional required readings will be posted on Canvas. See separate document with list of required and recommended readings.

### **Assignments**

1. *Participation*. There will be no formal grade for participation, but I expect you to be in class every week and to participate in an active and informed way. This is a graduate seminar, and your learning will come through reading and discussions. Please have the readings for each week done before class starts on Wednesdays.
2. *Short report on methods*, due in class on Sept. 1. This is a 1-2 page informal summary of a methodological and/or theoretical approach that you have found helpful in your scholarly work in religious studies. 5% of your grade.
3. *IRB approval*. You must complete the training to be approved for IRB2 (human subjects) by 9/17. If you have already completed this, submit your informed consent, interview or survey questions, and other documentation. More information is at <https://my.irb.ufl.edu/> and information on required training is at: <http://irb.ufl.edu/index/requiredtraining.html>. 5% of grade.
4. *Class presentations*. Starting in week 3, students will sign up to do short presentations on the day's readings. Depending on the number of students, each will do two or three presentations. The purpose is not summarize the reading but to identify major questions, issues, and themes for discussion. The presentations will count for a total of 30% of your grade.
5. *Three critical commentary papers* (about 5 pages each). These will answer questions reflecting on the readings for each section of the class. They will count 20% each, for a total of 60% of final grade. Due 9/27, 11/1, and 12/13.

### **Schedule**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic and Assignments</u>	<u>Readings</u>
<b>Module 1: Introduction</b>		
8/25	What is theory? What is it good for? Syllabus Exercise: “applying” theory	
9/1	Theories and methods	Omer  Optional: Cadge et al; Kupari, Ploch, Vernon
***Student reports on methods/theories due in class today. Please also upload to Canvas.		
<b>Module 2: Origins of the comparative study of religion</b>		
9/8	Early theorists	Müller, Ch. 22, “On False Analogies,” in <i>Selected Essays</i>  Douglas, <i>Purity and Danger</i> , Introduction and Ch. 1  Evans-Pritchard, “The Meaning of Sacrifice among the Nuer”  Optional: Frazer, <i>The Golden Bough</i>
9/15	Anthropological approaches	Levi-Strauss, “The Science of the Concrete,” “The Sorcerer and his Magic,” and “The Structural Study of Myth”  Turner, “Sacrifice as Quintessential Prophylaxis or Abandonment” and “Themes in the Symbolism of Ndembu Hunting Ritual”
***Complete IRB approval by 9/17***		
9/22	Emile Durkheim	Durkheim, <i>Elementary Forms of the Religious Life</i> : Introduction, Book I (all), Book II (Ch. 1-2), Book II (Ch. 1, 3, 5), and Conclusion

\*\*\*First paper due by midnight 9/27\*\*\*

### Module 3: Diversifying and canonizing the study of religion

9/29	Max Weber	Weber, <i>Sociology of Religion</i> , Ch. 1-4, 6, 7, and 13
10/6	Karl Marx	Marx, "On the Jewish Question," "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," "Theses on Feuerbach," "The German Ideology: Part I," and <i>Capital</i> , Vol. 1, Part 1, Ch. 1, section 4: "The Fetishism of Commodities" (pp. 319-329 in <i>The Marx-Engels Reader</i> )
10/13	Pragmatism	James, <i>Varieties of Religious Experience</i> , Lectures II-V  Dewey, <i>A Common Faith</i>
10/20	Freud	Freud, <i>The Future of an Illusion</i>
10/27	Modern classics	Bellah, "Civil Religion in America"  Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" and "Notes on the Balinese Cockfight"  Berger, <i>The Sacred Canopy</i> , Ch. 1 and "Some Second Thoughts on Substantive vs. Functional Definitions of Religion"

\*\*\*Second paper due by midnight 11/1\*\*\*

### Module 4: Texts, theology, and philosophy

11/3	History of religions	Eliade, <i>The Sacred and the Profane</i>
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11/10	Biblical Interpretation	Alter, "Sacred History and the Beginning of Prose Fiction"  Ogden, "Theology and Biblical Interpretation"  Schussler-Fiorenza, "The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation"  Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation"
11/17	Theology and religious studies	H. R. Niebuhr, <i>Christ and Culture</i> , Ch. 1 and 7; <i>The Meaning of Revelation</i> , Ch. 1  Tillich, "Religion and Secular culture," "The Method of Correlation" and "The Protestant Principle and the Proletarian Situation"
11/24	No class – Thanksgiving	
12/1	Philosophy of religion	Bayne, <i>Philosophy of Religion</i>
12/8	Historical ethnography	Comaroff, <i>Body of Power</i>  Recommended: Orsi, "Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World we Live in?"

\*\*\**Final paper due by midnight Monday, December 13*\*\*\*