"All we can hope for is some relatively adequate understandings."
– David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*

Introduction to the Study of Religion

• RELI 250 •

Peter Gottschalk
Office hours:
1.30-2.30 Tuesday *in Usdan*
10.30-11.30 Thursday *in Fisk 117*
& by appointment

spring 2017
Department of Religion 103
& Fisk 117
pgottschalk@wesleyan.edu
tel. ext. 2293

Goals:

Using specific case studies, this course seeks to introduce students to the empirical study of religion by examining
(1) the various intellectual tools used in that study;
(2) the cultural context of those tools; and
(3) the debates arising from their use.

Introduction

Jan 30 Αποκάλυψις

The Challenge of Meaning & Interpretation
Case Study of the End of the World

Feb 1 Reader: Apocalypse or Book of Revelation
Christianity background

Feb 6 Harding, Introduction and chapter 9

Feb 8 Tabor & Gallagher, chapter 2
in-class film: Waco: Rules of Engagement

Feb 13 Tabor & Gallagher, chapter 3

Feb 15 Reader: Coogan, Brettler, Newsom, & Perkins, "Translation of the Bible into English," etc.

Defining Religion

Feb 20 Tabor & Gallagher, chapter 7
Reader: Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious"

Religion and Secularism
Case Study of the Cemetery of Confrontation

Feb 22 Reader: Talal Asad, "Introduction: Thinking about Religion"
Sullivan, chapter 1

Feb 27 Sullivan, chapters 2 & 3
Paper no. 1 due: on the dynamics of interpretation

Mar 1 Sullivan, chapter 4

Mar 6 Sullivan, chapter 5
Tabor & Gallagher, chapter 8

Comparison
Case Studies of European Difference

Mar 8 Reader: Jonathan Z. Smith, "In Comparison a Magic Dwells" & "The 'End' of Comparison"
Reader: Mayanthi Fernando, "Reconfiguring Freedom"

Spring Break – yeeeeeeeee-haaaaaaaaaa!

March 28 & 30 class does not meet due to conference
Islam background recorded PowerPoints
Reader: Mayanthi Fernando, "Exceptional Citizens"

Apr 3 Reader: Outline of the Nation of Islam and Malcolm X's life
Malcolm X, chs 1-3, 8-9

Religious Experience
Case Study of Malcolm X's Conversions

Apr 5 Malcolm X, chs 11-15
Paper no. 2 due: on secularism

Apr 10 Malcolm X, chs 16-19

Apr 12 Reader: William James, from *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

Apr 17 Harding, chapter 1 – alternative conversion reading

Myth
Case Study of Living Today with the Ancient Krishna

Apr 19 Haberman, chapter 1

Apr 24 Reader: Jonathan Z. Smith, "I Am a Parrot (Red)"
Reader: Bruce Lincoln, "Myth, Sentiment, and the Construction of Social Forms" & "The Politics of Myth"

Apr 26 Haberman, chapter 2

May 1 Reader: Arvind Sharma, "What Is Hinduism?"
Reader: Don Baker, "World Religions and National States: Competing Claims in East Asia"
Paper no. 3: on religious experience or myth.

Ritual
Case Studies of Malcolm X's Hajj and Krishna Devotees' Pilgrimage

May 3 Turner, chapter 3

May 8 Turner, chapter 4

TBA **Optional study week study session**

Final learning opportunity
Section 1: May 16, Tuesday, 9:00 am to noon
Section 2: May 16, Tuesday, 2:00 to 5:00 pm
(Sections may not be switched unless replacement found)

Required books
Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley* (0345350685)
David L. Haberman, *Journey through the Twelve Forests: An Encounter with Krishna* (01950846799)
Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell* (0691089582)
Winnifred Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (0691130582)
James D. Tabor and Eugene V. Gallagher, *Why Waco?* (0520208994)
Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (0202011909)
Reader available at Cardinal Print and Copy (use your student portfolio)
All readings are available on reserve, except the reader

Class participation
We endeavor to create **a learning community** in which you discuss the issues that are of concern to you and hear those of others, even as we all share our questions. Class attendance is mandatory and students are expected to be punctual and participate in discussions. Students who plan to miss class due to a religious holiday must notify the professor two weeks in

advance. Your participation grade relies heavily on your familiarity with the readings and your insightful, critical engagement with them and the other content shared in the seminar.

Classroom etiquette
Our time together is an opportunity to forge an environment and community of learning. The more focused and respectful we are of that time and place, the more intense our experience and the greater the possibilities for discovery. To that end, please observe the following courtesies during class.

- **Disagree** with your classmates and professor, but **do not disrespect** any of them.
- Have **no communication with anyone outside** of class during class.
- Go to the **bathroom before class**: folks coming and going disrupt others.
- If you're loquacious, **be mindful** of allowing others the chance to speak; if you're the strong silent type, **rise to the occasion** of helping carry the conversation.

Note: Critical analysis is not just the act of criticizing (although it can lead to this). Rather, it is the methodical application of theoretical tools in order to see more in a text than the text explicitly states.

Reflective journal
Each student once a week will submit **by 9 am the day of class** three sentences regarding that day's reading **that references specific parts of the reading (include page numbers)**. The first two sentences will offer **a critical observation about the reading**. The third will be **a critical question regarding the reading**. These will be submitted on Moodle and assessed according to the seriousness and intention given to them. Grading is based on (1) the understanding of the reading and (2) the effort and sophistication of critical thinking: 0 • 1 (√–) • 2 (√) • 3 (√+)

Papers
Students have three chances to demonstrate their understanding of readings and apply it in their own unique manner through essays. Each paper should be **only three pages** in length.

> **Grades will be assigned according to** (a) the cogency of the argumentation, (b) the pertinence to the question, and (c) the application and mastery of our class material. You must reference specific parts of the readings indicated, noting the page numbers to which the paper refers. **One of the three must be submitted electronically to sdursin@wesleyan.edu**

All written work must:

- *be **double-spaced** and in **12-point** font*
- *have the page numbers noted for all **references** to class readings*
- *be submitted to **TurnItIn.com** (accessed through your portfolio)*
- *include **no more than one quote** of full sentence length (quoting words or phrases is fine within reason).*

Final Learning Opportunity

An exam will provide you the opportunity to **assimilate the material** discussed over the previous weeks **and demonstrate your particular insights**. This opportunity will occur on the date & time established by the Registrar. Students may not switch sections for the learning opportunity unless they find someone in the other section who chooses to switch with them.

Grading

Each student's grade is calculated as follows: attendance, participation, & journal (10%); three papers (20% each); and final (30%).

Overall, grading follows Wesleyan's stated rubric:
A, excellent; B, good; C, fair; D, passing but unsatisfactory; E, failure; and F, bad failure.
http://www.wesleyan.edu/registrar/academic_regulations/academic_standing.html

Accommodations

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible.

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860-685-5581 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

PLEASE! Do not hesitate to discuss with me your needs for any accommodation.

Curmudgeonly notice

The use of computers, tablets, and cell phones is not allowed in the class, except for those with demonstrated need. While I appreciate that some students may find it easier to type than write, the unfortunately inevitable web surfing, Facebooking, and texting by a few students distracts the rest, and the prof. Plus, if you have seen *Battlestar Galactica*, *Her*, or any number of Star Trek episodes, I think you'll agree with me that we don't want to bring computers into our classrooms and make them any smarter than they already are. Students with a documented need are exempt from this anti-modern diktat.

Honor System

Students are expected to abide by the Honor System in regard to all work and participation in this class. For details, see:
http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/standardsregulations/studentconduct.html

The 13 Deadly Sins in the Empirical Study of Religion

I. Religions are like cars. To understand one, you just need to determine what type of fuel it uses, how old it is, where it was made, whether the steering wheel is on the left or right, and who tends to drive it. It has defined features and a specific form and, despite model variations, is relatively the same everywhere and at all times. *This is the sin of reification.*

II. Religions *say* this or *do* that. *This is the sin of personifying religions.*

III. Religions are like clubs with a list of rules and ideas everyone must and do conform to. *This is the sin of universalization.*

IV. Religious books are read like novels, cover to cover, and everything inside is taken as gospel truth by believers. *This is the sin of ignoring context.*

V. Contradictions in religious belief or practice are a sign of hypocrisy. *This is the sin of judging practitioners according to an outsider's understanding of their ideals.*

VI. Religion preaches peace. Religions that don't aren't real religions or are faulty religions. *This is the first symptom of the Jesus-Buddha syndrome.*

VII. Religion preaches humility. Religious leaders who aren't humble aren't really religious. *This is the second symptom of the Jesus-Buddha syndrome.*

VIII. Real religion is only concerned with the spiritual. The involvement of a religion with money or politics shows ulterior motives at work. *This is the final symptom of the Jesus-Buddha syndrome.*

IX: Belief is the starting point of all religions. *This is the sin of applying Luther to all religions.*

X: Religions are ultimately about morality. *This is the sin of applying Protestant ideals to all religions.*

XI: Practices that religious people do but can't explain are empty rituals. They are just going through the motions. *This is the sin of rationalism.*

XII: Religious people with extreme beliefs are fundamentalists. *This is the sin of equating "safe" religions with "true" religion and declaring the rest as aberrations*

XIII: Religions can be known by examining their canons, ministers, and sacred scripture. *This is the sin of using Christian-derived terms (yes, including the term "sin") to describe non-Christian traditions.*