

REL490 Capstone Senior Seminar, Spring 2005

Wednesdays, 2-4:40pm, 101f SSC (Student Services Center) or Manly 200A (Jan. 5, 12)

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Office hour: Mondays 1-2pm

Web: www.as.ua.edu/rel/rel490schaeff.html

The Course

The work of Jonathan Z. Smith has exerted a profound influence on the study of religion since the 1970s. Smith has stated boldly that “for the self-conscious student of religion, no datum possesses intrinsic interest. It is of value only insofar as it can serve as an exemplum of some fundamental issue in the study of religion.” Smith’s work endeavors to model this self-consciousness, while at the same time highlighting what he takes to be fundamental issues in both the study of religion and the college education more broadly. The goal of this class is to understand how Smith has exemplified methodological self-consciousness in his writing.

Objectives

1. To acquire general knowledge of the History of Religions as an academic field in general, and the writings of one of this field’s foremost writers, Jonathan Z. Smith, in particular.
2. To provide an opportunity for critical reflection, open debate, and discussion on the relations of religion, myths, and rituals to past and contemporary human thought, practice, and social institutions.
3. To learn to see one’s own cultural practices as having points of similarity with, and difference from, those of other peoples, removed from us both in time and space.
4. To learn to define an area of study as well as to practice and refine the skills of description and non-evaluative comparison.
5. To develop and improve critical reading and thinking skills.
6. To provide an opportunity for honing writing and public presentation skills.

Grading and assignments

Grading is based upon three components, 1. Seminar discussion guides (30%); 2. Participation and abstracts (30%); 3. Research paper and presentation (40%):

1. Seminar Discussion guides

This is a student driven seminar, and each of you will make a substantial contribution to our meetings. For every class meeting, two or more of you will be assigned to present the day’s readings. Working in pairs, you will prepare a discussion guide for one or more of our reading assignments. You will sign up for the entire semester’s assignments on the first day. On your assigned day you will bring a written work to hand out to your peers and the instructor, consisting of the following elements:

1. A written summary of approximately one to two pages describing in your own words the principle themes and topics of the reading;
2. A detailed outline of the reading;
3. An analysis of its form (i.e., what kind of book is it: autobiography, historical work, scholarly study?). How does this effect your reading? Who is the intended audience? What is the perspective/position of the author?
4. Three discussion questions in writing. Each of the rest of the group will bring one discussion question.
5. A list of important terms used in the reading, for which more information may be found in the reference works listed below (cite page numbers).

2. Abstracts of materials and seminar participation

For each chapter or essay of readings listed in the schedule, you will provide an abstract. The purpose of these abstracts is to prepare you for our class discussions. Abstracts are descriptive summaries of both an article’s bibliographic information and its essential features. Accordingly, abstracts provide an important service to your colleagues by communicating basic information. Abstracts must get to the point quickly and

avoid commentary and analysis. An abstract should communicate an argument's key aspects to any reader not familiar with the original article. Generally, a good abstract should not exceed 150-200 words and should include an accurate description of the author's thesis, theory, methods of analysis, data, and conclusions. Specifically, you will address three points:

1. State the research problem:
 - *The central problem posed
 - *The argument for a solution to that problem
2. State the proposed solution to the problem
3. Describe sources and methods
 - *What types of sources are used
 - *How that argument is supported (i.e., how are those sources deployed)

In doing this, pay attention to both content (what the author says) and style (how the author says it).

3. Final Project

Your final project will be to apply Smith's methods to the Heaven's Gate group in comparison with another religious group. Working in pairs, you will present your findings in class on April 20th. The written essay will be due Friday, May 6, 2005 at 11:30am.

Attendance and assignment policy

Attendance and active participation in the class are both important and mandatory. Group discussion will form a part of all class periods, so it is essential that you come with clearly formulated comments and questions regarding the day's topics. It is always preferable, naturally, that you be thoroughly prepared for class, but never under any circumstances should you stay away due to lack of preparation. In view of these considerations, there should be no absences, except for absolute emergencies. Each unexcused absence reduces the grade one grade, i.e. from A- to B+, etc.. There will be no make-up work for missed assignments due to unexcused absences. You will be able to fulfill incomplete assignments only if you have spoken to me about your circumstances prior to the due date of the assignment, or if the assignment is missed due to a documented emergency. There will be no extra-credit assignments.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious scholarly offence and amounts to using the intellectual labor of another author without proper quotation, citation, and acknowledgment. If the instructor suspects that a student has copied the work of another author (whether that author is a peer, classmate, or published author), the case will immediately be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Disabilities

Students with documented physical and/or learning disabilities should contact the professor outside of class time (i.e., make an appointment to see him at his office), as soon as possible, to provide copies of their documentation and to discuss the reasonable accommodations which can be made to meet their needs. However, prior to contacting the professor, ensure that you contact the Office of Disability Services, which is located at 220 Research Drive, P.O. Box 870185 (two blocks east of the Ferguson Center, between Shelby Hall and Bryce Hospital) or call them at 348-4285.

Books and Readings

Books can be purchased at: **Alabama Book Store** (1015 University Boulevard, 758-4532 or 703 Paul Bryant Drive 759-5430), **The College Store** (807 Paul W. Bryant Drive. 758-9009), **University Supply Store** (Ferguson Center, 348-6168 or Tutwiler Hall, 348-7628). Other readings will be available at Gorgas Library's electronic course reserves.

Books by Jonathan Z. Smith.

Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion (Chicago: 2005)

Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown (Chicago: 1982).

To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual (Chicago: 1987).

Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity (Chicago: 1990).

Articles by J. Z. Smith

"The Necessary Lie: Duplicity in the Disciplines." <http://teaching.uchicago.edu/handbook/tac12.html>. 2000.

"Playful Acts of Imagination." *Liberal Education* 73/5: 14-20. 1978.

Other Books and Articles

Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: 1959).

Joseph M. Kitigawa, "The History of Religions at Chicago." in *The History of Religions: Understanding Human Experience*. (Atlanta: 1987): 133-144.

_____. "The History of Religions in America," in *The History of Religions: Understanding Human Experience*. (Atlanta: 1987): 3-26.

Mark W. Muesse, "Religious Studies and "Heaven's Gate": Making the Strange Familiar and the Familiar Strange," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (April 25, 1997). Reprinted in Russell T. McCutcheon, ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 1999), 390-94.

Reference Works

The Encyclopedia of Religion. Mircea Eliade, ed., (New York: 1987). 16 volumes.

The Encyclopedia of Religion, 2nd ed. Lindsey Jones, ed. (New York: 2005).

The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion, Jonathan Z. Smith, ed. (San Francisco: 1995).

Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics vol. 1-12, James Hastings, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908-26). 12 volumes.

Copies of each are located in the reference section of the Gorgas Library, as well as in the Department Library (Manly 200), which is generally open 9am to 5pm, Mon. to Fri.

REL490 Spring 2005, Wednesdays, 2-4:40pm. Schedule (Subject to Change)

I. "History of Religions" as an academic discipline

January 5 (1): Introduction.

January 12 (2): Kitigawa, "The History of Religions in America." Kitigawa, "The History of Religions at Chicago," Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, Introduction, chapters 1, 2, 4

*Presenters: _____ & _____

II. Defining Religion and the Comparative Study of Religion

January 19 (3): *Relating Religion*, chapters 7-8; *Imagining Religion*, Introduction, chapters 1-2

*Presenters: _____ & _____

[January 26: No Class]

February 2 (4): *Imagining Religion*, chapters, 4, 5, 6

*Presenters: _____ & _____

III. A History of Comparative Religion

February 9 (5): *Drudgery Divine*, Introduction, chapters 1-3

*Presenters: _____ & _____

February 16 (6): *Drudgery Divine*, chapters 4-5

*Presenters: _____ & _____

IV. From Sacred Space to Place and Ritual

February 23 (7): *To Take Place*, Introduction, chapters 1-3

*Presenters: _____ & _____

March 2 (8): *To Take Place*, chapters 4-5

*Presenters: _____ & _____

March 9 (9): *Relating Religion*, chapters 4, 10, 14

*Presenters: _____ & _____

V. Difference, Redescription, and Translation

March 16 (10): *Relating Religion*, chapter 1, 16

*Presenters: _____ & _____

March 23 (11): *Relating Religion*, 11-13

*Presenters: _____ & _____

VI. Applying Smith's Methods to Heaven's Gate

April 6 (12): *Imagining Religion*, chapter 7; *Relating Religion*, chapter 17

*Presenters: _____ & _____

April 13 (13): Group Work (no formal class)

April 20 (14): Presentation and Discussion. Smith, "Playful Acts of Imagination," "The Necessary Lie."

April 27: No Class (Dead Week)

Final essays due no later than: Friday, May 6, 2005 at 11:30am.