Religion 151: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION
Wesleyan University (Fall 2015)

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Office Hours: Tues. 2:45-4:00; Wed. 1:00-4:00; and by appointment
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Course Description
The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the academic study of religion. We will focus, in part, on religious communities in the United States, but will offer neither an overview of American religious history nor a survey of global religious diversity. Rather, we will use a series of empirical case studies to explore theoretical issues in the study of religion. Among other topics, we will examine: the construction of “religion” as a conceptual category; anthropological approaches to religious difference; theories of religious experience; the interpretation of religious texts; and the place of religion in American history and culture. Together, these discussions will offer a set of descriptive, analytical, and explanatory tools for understanding the role of religion in contemporary social and political life.

Course Requirements
1. Punctual attendance at every meeting of the class. You will be held responsible for everything said and done in class.
2. Careful preparation of the assigned readings prior to their discussion in class. This course is designed to develop critical skills in close reading. You will therefore need to keep up with the scheduled readings, study them carefully, and come to class with both your books and a solid grasp of the assigned texts.
3. Two in-class tests, with a take-home component (on Oct. 1 and Nov. 3), each worth 20% of your grade.
4. An essay (5-6 pp.) due online on Nov. 24, worth 30% of your grade.
5. A comprehensive (Registrar-scheduled) final exam on Sat., Dec. 19, 2:00-5:00, worth 30% of your grade.

Fair Warnings
1. Laptops and other electronic devices can be distracting and must be used judiciously.
2. You are responsible for knowing and adhering to the University’s Honor Code.

Required Textbooks (at Broad Street Books)

**Required Course Packet** (available through the print shop; order through your portfolio)

**SYLLABUS**

1. Sept. 8  **INTRODUCING AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION**
   *Richard Eden, *A treatyse of the newe India, with other new founde landes and Ilandes, aswell eastwarde as westwarde, as they are knownen and founden in these oure dayes, after the descripccion of Sebastian Munster in his boke of universall Cosmographie: wherein the diligent reader may see the good successe and rewarde of noble and honeste enterpryses, by the which not only worldly ryches are obtayned, but also God is glorified, and the Christian fayth enlarged* (1553), unpaginated p. 162: “At Columbus first comming thether, the inhabitanteres [of the Canary Islands] went naked, without shame, religion or knowledge of God.”

   **UNIT 1: DEFINING THE SUBJECT AND OBJECT OF RELIGION**
   “The first thing the intellect does with an object is to class it along with something else. But any object that is infinitely important to us and awakens our devotion feels to us also as if it must be *sui generis* and unique. Probably a crab would be filled with a sense of personal outrage if it could hear us class it without ado or apology as a crustacean, and thus dispose of it. ‘I am no such thing,’ it would say; ‘I am MYSELF, MYSELF alone.’”

2. Sept. 10  **WHAT IS RELIGION?**
   **Reading:** James: lectures 1-2 (pp. 1-52)

3. Sept. 15  **WHAT IS RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE?**
   **Reading:** James: lectures 3-8 (pp. 53-188)

4. Sept. 17  **ON CONVERSION**
   **Reading:** James: lectures 9-10 (pp. 189-258)

5. Sept. 22  **DESCRIBING RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE**
   **Reading:** James: lectures 11-15 (pp. 259-378)

6. Sept. 24  **ON MYSTICISM**
   **Reading:** James: lectures 16-17 (pp. 379-429)
7. Sept. 29  EXPLAINING RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE  
Reading: James: lectures 18-20, postscript (pp. 430-527)  

8. Oct. 1  *IN-CLASS TEST (WITH A TAKE-HOME COMPONENT) ON UNIT 1*  

UNIT 2: ENCOUNTERING RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE  
“One may speak of the Jones situation as that of a cult, but it would be a sad mistake to identify it in any way with Christianity. It is true that he came from a religious background but what he did and how he thought can have no relationship to the views and teachings of any legitimate form of historic Christianity. We have witnessed a false messiah who used the cloak of religion to cover a confused mind filled with a mixture of pseudo-religion, political ambition, sensual lust, financial dishonesty and, apparently, even murder. . . . Apparently, Mr. Jones was a slave of a diabolical supernatural power from which he refused to be set free.”  

Reading: Chidester: preface, prologue, introduction, ch. 1 (pp. xi-xxviii, 1-50, 171-77)  

10. Oct. 8  RELIGION AND VIOLENCE  
Reading: Chidester: ch. 2-3 (pp. 51-104, 177-80)  

11. Oct. 13  SALVATION AND SUICIDE  
Reading: Chidester: ch. 4-5, epilogue (pp. 105-69, 180-85)  

UNIT 3: THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF RELIGION  
“For years, I stood at the crossroads that [the Reverend Melvin] Campbell and others fashioned for me, in between being lost and being saved, listening. I made that psychic intersection between born-again and unborn-again languages and worlds my field site, my home away from home. That is where I needed to be in order to do my fieldwork. . . . Standing in the gap between conscious belief and willful unbelief, in a place I call ‘narrative belief,’ opens up born-again language and makes available its complexity, its variety and creativity, and its agile force.”  

12. Oct. 15  WHAT IS FUNDAMENTALISM?  
Reading: Harding: preface, introduction, ch. 1-2 (pp. ix-xvi, 3-82, 283-93)  

13. Oct. 20  THE LANGUAGE OF CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM  
Reading: Harding: ch. 3-5 (pp. 85-152, 293-300)  

Reading: Harding: ch. 6-8 (pp. 153-227, 300-307)
*Oct. 27: FALL BREAK*

15. Oct. 29  THE POLITICS OF CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM  
Reading: Harding: ch. 9-10, postscript, appendix A (pp. 228-79, 307-12)

16. Nov. 3  **IN-CLASS TEST (WITH A TAKE-HOME COMPONENT) ON UNITS 2 AND 3**

UNIT 4: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND THE CONSTITUTION  
*First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States (approved September 25, 1789; ratified December 15, 1791):*  
“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof . . .”

17. Nov. 5  LYNCH V. DONNELLY  

18. Nov. 10  ON THE CRÈCHE AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELIGION  

19. Nov. 12  EMPLOYMENT DIVISION V. SMITH  
Reading: Employment Division, Department of Human Resources of Oregon, et al. v. Smith et al., 494 U.S. 872.

20. Nov. 17  ON PEYOTE AND THE FREE EXERCISE OF RELIGION  
Reading: Employment Division, Department of Human Resources of Oregon, et al. v. Smith et al., 494 U.S. 872.

21. Nov. 19  LUKUMI BABALU AYE V. HIALEAH  
Reading: Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye, Inc., et al. v. City of Hialeah, 508 U.S. 520.

*Nov. 24: NO CLASS: *AN ESSAY (5-6 PP.) DUE ONLINE TODAY*

22. Dec. 1  ON ANIMAL SACRIFICE AS A RELIGIOUS PRACTICE  
Reading: Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye, Inc., et al. v. City of Hialeah, 508 U.S. 520.

23. Dec. 3  WARNER V. BOCA RATON  
Reading: Sullivan: introduction, ch. 1-2, Appendix A (pp. 1-53, 161-78, 245-55)

24. Dec. 8  ON THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM  
Reading: Sullivan: ch. 3-4, Appendix B (pp. 54-137, 179-218, 255-64)

25. Dec. 10  HOW SHOULD WE THINK AND TALK ABOUT RELIGION?  
Reading: Sullivan: ch. 5, Appendix C (pp. 138-59, 219-44, 264-67)

*COMPREHENSIVE (REGISTRAR-SCHEDULED) FINAL EXAM ON SAT., DEC. 19, 2:00-5:00*