

University of Calgary
Faculty of Humanities
Department of Religious Studies
Fall 2008
Religious Studies 601.05 L01/701.05 L01
The Making of Western Religions
T 11:00 – 13:45

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Texts

Fitzgerald, Timothy. *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*
Hughes, Aaron W. *Situating Islam*
Lopez, Donald. *The Prisoners of Shangri-La*
Masuzawa, Tomoko. *The Invention of Western Religions*
Smith, Jonathan Z. *Drudgery Divine*.

Course Description

This graduate seminar seeks to demonstrate how the cognitive categories of scholarship are themselves historical artifacts that change over time. To examine this and related questions we shall examine the discourses, imagined and manufactured, used to create and sustain “western religions.” Why and how do we excise a set of human and social activities from others and the deftly label them as “religious”? How do we subsequently define them as “western” and then neatly bracket them off from something called “eastern” religions, especially when the very term religion is a protestant category that enters our conceptual vocabulary at a particular historical moment? To explore these questions, we shall read a number of theoretical works that deal with the scholarly creation of a curriculum known as “world religions,” and then explore the ways in which the category “religion” was created in the west by differentiating it from related terms such as the secular and the political. We will also examine how a number of extra-academic concerns have created the discourses of early Christianity and Judaism. Finally, by way of comparison, we shall look at the western discourses that have gone into the creation and formation of Tibetan Buddhism.

Core Competencies

To encourage students to begin to think critically and creatively about the way we manufacture data to justify our academic existences.

Course Requirements

1. Preparation and Participation (30%). Regular **participation** is mandatory, since one of the primary goals of this course is to encourage students to be active participants in a collective attempt to understand and critically assess complex theoretical implications of what it means to study something we often too lazily call “religion.” By **participation** I mean a careful and *analytical* reading of the assigned texts (before the relevant class meeting). Please note that to engage in an analytical reading means that the reader should *ask questions* of her texts. Such questions should include, but not be restricted to, the following:

- a. *What is (are) the basic theoretical presupposition(s) of this work?* (E.g., religion is a problem that needs a solution; religion is to be “understood” and “interpreted,” but not “explained.”)
- b. *From what disciplinary angle(s) does the author approach his or her subject matter?* (I.e., does the author primarily wear the hat of a historian, sociologist, political scientist, etc.)
- c. *What, in a nutshell, is the author’s theory of religion? Does s/he offer a definition of religion? If so, what is it and does it adequately reflect the author’s theory?*
- d. *What is the principle evidence that the author offers in support of this theory/definition? Is this evidence convincing? Why or why not?*
- e. *What is the special genius of this work?*
- f. *What is (are) this work’s major drawback(s)?*
- g. *Against what perspective(s) on religion does the author seem to be reacting?*
- h. *Can you discern a broader cultural or intellectual agenda behind this author’s work?*
- i. *Is the author influenced by a particular theory of gender, class, or ethnic/race relations?*
- j. *In what way(s), if any, has this work changed or contributed to your thinking about religion?*

2. Paper (70%). Due on the last day of classes. This paper will encourage you to apply some of the theoretical discussions in our seminar to your own data. You will be required to submit a proposal for this paper midway through the class so that I can see that you are on the right track.

Schedule of Classes and Readings

Week One

Intro to Class and read Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious” (photocopy outside of my office)

Weeks Two and Three

Smith, *Drudgery Divine*

Weeks Four and Five

Masuzawa, *The Invention of Western Religions*

Weeks Six and Seven

Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*

Weeks Eight and Nine

Lopez, *The Prisoners of Shangri-La*

Weeks Ten and Eleven

Hughes, *Situating Islam*

Weeks Twelve and Thirteen

Discussion and TBA