REL 4030

Methods in the Study of Religion

Section: U01

In Person

Spring Term 2027

Course Meeting Information

Instructor: Mr. Daniel Alvarez

Class Hours: MWW, 12:00 pm-12:50 pm

Office Hours: TBA

CHARLES PERRY (CP) 441

Professor Information

Daniel Alvarez

Roles: Primary Instructor

Email: alvarezd@fiu.edu

Phone: 305-348-2354

Office Hours: TBA

Office Location: SIPA 501

Website: religion.fiu.edu

Department or Academic Unit: Religious Studies

Course Prerequisites

Course prerequisites, if any, are listed below.

Prerequisite: Admission to program or permission of the instructor.

Course Description

The course will analyze different theories and methods in the study of religion. This area of study necessarily demands an interdisciplinary approach to the subject, taking into account the different disciplinary approaches. We have identified important perspectives coming from History, Theology, Philosophy, Psychology, Psychoanalysis, Sociology and Anthropology; our course will present a panorama of these approaches, with special emphasis on anthropological, sociological, phenomenological, historical, post-structuralist, and liberationist approaches. The course will develop key issues and concepts on the study of

religion. It will be taught in a seminar format.

Readings, Materials, and Open Educational Resources (OER)

SUGGESTED READINGS POSTED ON CANVAS:

Jonathan Z.. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious” (from *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*)

History-of-Religions Methodology:

Ernst Troeltsch, “Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology”

_____, “The Place of Christianity Among the World Religions”

_____, “Half a Century of Theology: A Review”

Anthropological Methodology:

Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System”

_____, “Thick Description: Toward and Interpretive Theory of Culture”

Asad, “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category” [on Geertz]

Deflem, “Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion” [on Victor Turner]

Sociological Methodology:

Peter Berger, selection from *The Sacred Canopy*

Phenomenological Methodology:

Martin Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism”

Jurgen Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere”

Selbo, “Religion and Rationality: Review of Habermas’ *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*

Liberation Theology Methodology:

Clodovis Boff, Epistemology and Method of Liberation Theology”

Peter Phan, “Method in Liberation Theologies”

James Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation

Feminist Methodology:

Rosemary Ruether, “Feminist Theology: Methodology, Sources, and Norms”

Mernissi, “The Hijab and the Veil,” from *The Veil and the Male Elite*

Mahmoud, “The Subject of Freedom,” from *The Politics of Piety*

Post-Structuralist Methodology:

Michel Foucault, “Truth & and Power”

_____, “Governmentality”

Lemke, “Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique” [on Foucault]

Gordon, “Governmental Rationality: An Introduction” [on Foucaulty]

Psychological Methodology:

Kroeber, “Totem and Taboo in Retrospect” [on Freud]

Textbook and Course Materials

Ten Theories of Religion

Subtitle: 4th Edition

Required/Recommended: Required

Authors: Daniel Pals

Publisher: Oxford University Press

Publication Date: 2021

Copyright Date: 2021

ISBN 10: 0190935081

ISBN 13: 9780190935085

Chapters/Pages: Required pages on the course outline

Panther Book Pack

Get all required course materials for $22 per undergrad credit hour through Panther Book Pack. You'll be charged automatically unless you opt out within 3 days after the add/drop deadline.

For more details, to compare costs, and to learn how to access your course materials, visit the Panther Book Pack information page on FIU OneStop.

Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives

- 1. Students will be able to apply one or more methods for

the study of religion in course's required research project.

- 2. Students will learn about a variety of methods for the study of religion beyond the method applicable in their individual focus area of study.
- 3. Students will be able to compare and contrast diverse methodological approaches to the study of religion across different academic disciplines (sociology, history, anthropology, psychology, phenomenology, and theology).
- 4. Students will able to demonstrate their understanding of one or two methodologies and their use of technology in an oral PowerPoint presentation.
- 5. Students will be able to demonstrate their understanding of the study of religion using a cross-disciplinary approach to the analysis of religious phenomena.

Expectations of the Course

See course objectives.

Assignments & Assessments

1. Research paper (10-12 pages) on a course topic or one agreed in advance with the instructor (50% of grade).

2. One 2-page (double spaced) presentation on the reading for a particular week (25% of grade).

3. PowerPoint Presentation (25% of grade).

Grading

A 95-100 C 70-74

A- 91-94

B+ 88-90

B 83-87

B- 79-82

C+ 75-78

C 68-74

F 67 OR BELOW

Schedule of Topics

Week 1

HISTORICAL METHODOLOGY

Ernst Troeltsch, “Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology”

(1898) (on CANVAS); Alvarez, “The Study of Religion in the West: From the Enlightenment to 1900” (on Canvas).

Historical Methodology Applied with examples

Week 2

Alvin Plantinga’s Critique of Troeltsch

Alvin Plantinga, “Two Types of Scripture Scholarship” (on CANVAS);

Historical Methodology Applied: Selection from Bhagavad Gita, 1 Kings 12/2 Chronicles 13, Micah 4/Isaiah 2

Presentation on Plantinga versus Troeltsch:

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Week 3

SOCIOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

“Karl Marx,” and “Durkheim,” in Pals, 85-145. Recommended: *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*: *Introduction* (13-33);

Preliminary Questions (37-63); *Origins of these Beliefs-End* (235-262); *Conclusion* (462-496).

Week 4

"Weber," in Pals, 149-188; Mills & Wright, *Essays in Sociology*: *Bureaucracy* (196-244): *The Sociology of Charismatic Authority* (245-252) (on CANVAS).

Week 5

Sociological Methodology: Application: Early Catholicism in 2nd century Christianity

Presentation on Durkheim versus Marx or Weber's theory of types:

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Week 6

PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

"Otto and Eliade in Pals, 193-226**;** Olson, Chapter 4, pp. 100-124,

“Phenomenology and the Science of Religion” (on CANVAS).

Week 7

Martin Heidegger, selections from “Letter on Humanism” (on CANVAS)

Presentation on Otto or Eliade or Heidegger versus Sartre:

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Week 8

ANTHROPOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

“E. B. Tylor and James Frazer,” and “Clifford Geertz,” in Pals, 18-51; Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System”; Selection from Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*: Chapter 1, “Religions and World Construction” (on CANVAS).

Week 9

Anthropological Methodology: Application: Royal Ideology in the Ancient World

Presentation on Berger or Geertz:

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Week 10

LIBERATIONIST METHODOLOGY: LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Clodovis Boff, “Epistemology and Method of Liberation Theology” (on CANVAS).

Liberationist Methodology, Application IV: Prophetic Critique of Kingship in Ancient Israel; Luther’s and Calvin’s Critique of Roman Catholicism during the Reformation; the Peasant's revolt in Germany 1524-1526

Presentation on Boff’s methodology:

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Week 11 **Spring Break (no classes)**

Week 12

FEMINIST METHODOLOGY

“Mary Daly” in Pals; Rosemary Ruether, “Feminist Theology: Methodology, Sources, and Norms” (on CANVAS).

Presentation on Ruether’s methodology:

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Week 13

POST-STRUCTURALIST METHODOLOGY

Olson, pp. 548-557: Preface to Ch. 11, “Post-structural/Post-modern Approaches to Religion” (CANVAS); Michel Foucault, “Truth & and Power” (on CANVAS).

Presentation on Foucault’s methodology:

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Week 14 PowerPoint Presentations

Week 15 PowerPoint presentations (continued) and **RESEARCH PAPER DUE**

Policies & Resources

Before starting this course, please review the Policies & Resources Page in Canvas, which includes comprehensive information on various University and Course Level Policies such as:

- University Policies
- Accessibility and Accommodations
- Online Etiquette
- Technical Requirements and Skills
- Computer & Digital Literacy Skills
- Course Technology Accessibility Statements and Privacy Policies
- Academic Integrity
- Copyright Statement
- Nondiscrimination Statement
- Panthers Care & Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
- Fair Use Policy

Nondiscrimination Statement

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