

University of Calgary  
Faculty of Humanities  
Department of Religious Studies  
RELS 447 L20, Spring 2005

05/05/05

# Methodology in the Study of Religion

**Instructor:** Dr. Ayse Tuzlak  
**Class Meets:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00 – 3:45 pm  
**Office Hours:** By appointment. Please e-mail [ayse.tuzlak@ucalgary.ca](mailto:ayse.tuzlak@ucalgary.ca).  
**Phone:** 220-3287

What is religion? Most of us “know it when we see it,” but defining and understanding religion proves to be surprisingly difficult. Are all human beings religious? Are some religions better than others? Are we permitted to make ethical judgements about religions that seem strange or frightening? What is the relationship between religion and philosophy, or history, or psychology, or culture as a whole? How do we interpret phenomena that are not traditionally considered religious (sports, politics, art) but which share many of religion’s properties?

This course aims to familiarize students with the ways in which scholars of the past two hundred years have addressed these questions. Together we will read, discuss, and evaluate some of the most important and influential theories about religion: what it is, how it works, and what its effects on the world are.

## Core Competencies:

Students in this class will:

- acquire a broad understanding of important trends in anthropology, philosophy, psychology and religious studies over the past two hundred years;
- hone their skills at articulating their thoughts orally through class discussions;
- learn to evaluate and compare complex phenomena with sensitivity and rigour;
- think in an inter- and multi-disciplinary way about human society;
- improve their ability to express themselves in writing.

Please remember that the attainment of any learning endeavour requires that students commit time and energy to that endeavour. **Attend lectures, read assigned materials, and complete all course work.**

Note that **since this is a spring course, the pace is vastly accelerated.** You must make extra effort to keep up with your readings and to prepare your assignments.

## Required Texts:

James Thrower, *Religion: The Classical Theories*  
Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*  
Dennis Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain*  
Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*  
Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*

Readings marked with a dagger (†) are found in the Photocopied Course Packet, available at Bound & Copied in Mac Hall.

## Grading:

Written Assignment (5-7 pages, due <b>May 17</b> ):	10%
Weekly position papers (see below):	50%
Final Assignment (5-7 pages, due <b>June 29</b> ):	20%
Participation in class discussions:	10%

A numerical mark will be given for each course requirement. At the end of the course, an overall letter grade will be assigned on the following number and letter grade scheme.

A+	100 – 96	A	95 – 90	A-	89 – 85
B+	84 – 80	B	79 – 75	B-	74 – 70
C+	69 – 65	C	64 – 60	C-	59 – 55
D+	54 – 53	D	52 – 50	F	50 or less

No extra credit work will be offered.

N.B. All written assignments will be graded with regard to both form and content.

*Attendance is crucial.* You will be expected to contribute intelligently to the discussions in class, and you will not be able to do so unless you have done all the readings, attended all the lectures, engaged with your fellow classmates, and kept up with your course assignments.

## The Position Papers:

Every week, beginning May 24, you will be required to submit a 2-3 page position paper at the beginning of Tuesday's class. In each of these papers, you will take a stand on that week's reading, and then defend that stand. Do *not* waste time summarizing the reading. Rather, *analyze and evaluate* each author's ideas. Ask penetrating questions of the authors, and suggest some places where answers to those questions can be found. Explain what is useful and convincing about each article, and critique the parts that are not.

**Note that the position papers are due on the day that we BEGIN discussing the week's topic.** We will not have covered the material in class yet. What I want to see is your own interpretation, uninfluenced by me or by your other classmates.

On the Thursday class of each week, I will hand your papers back to you and use them to start discussion within the group. Be prepared to defend your position, not just to me, but to your other classmates in real-time as well! The Thursday classes will be devoted to discussion, during which I will not speak much at all.

## **Schedule:**

**May 12:**

*Readings:*

### **Religion as Revelation**

Selections from the Tanakh (*handout*)  
Selections from the Talmud (*handout*)  
Selections from the New Testament (*handout*)  
Selections from the Qur'an and Muslim traditions (*handout*)  
Thrower, chapter 2

**MAY 17**

### **ESSAY ON COVINGTON AND BROWN DUE**

**May 17 – 19:**

*Readings:*

### **Religion as Experience**

Thrower, chapter 3  
Dennis Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain*  
Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola*  
†Selections from William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*

**MAY 24**

### **WEEKLY POSITION PAPERS BEGIN**

**May 24 – 26:**

*Readings:*

### **Religion as Philosophy**

†Immanuel Kant, "Of Religion and Priestcraft"  
†Georg Hegel, "Determinate Religion"

**May 31 – June 2:**

*Readings:*

### **Religion as Human Construct and Primitive Error**

Thrower, chapters 5 and 6  
†James George Frazer, "Sympathetic Magic" and "Magic and Religion"  
†F. Max Müller, "Plea for a Science of Religion"  
†E.B. Tylor, "Animism"

**June 7 – 9:**

*Readings:*

### **Religion as Psychological Construct**

Thrower, chapter 7  
Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*  
Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*

**June 14 – 16:**

*Readings:*

### **Religion as Social Construct**

Thrower, chapter 8  
†Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy..."  
†Max Weber, "The Prophet" and "Charismatic Authority"

**June 21 – 23:**

*Readings:*

### **Religion as Patriarchal Construct**

†Joseph Campbell, "The Serpent's Bride"  
†Mary Daly, selections from *Gyn/Ecology*

**Final paper (5-7 pages) due Wednesday, June 29.**

**Academic Honesty:**

*Plagiarism is not tolerated at the University of Calgary and has serious consequences. Your essays/presentations must be your own work and inadequate referencing may be seen as plagiarism. Please see the relevant sections on Academic Misconduct in the current University Calendar. If you have questions about correct referencing, please consult your instructor.*

**Academic Accommodation:**

If you are a student with a disability who requires academic accommodation and you have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre, please contact their office at 220-8237. Students who have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre are not eligible for formal academic accommodation. Once registered, please discuss any upcoming tests/examinations with the instructor **two weeks** before the scheduled date.

**Withdrawing from courses:**

Please note the information regarding withdrawals and fee refunds in the Academic Schedule of the current University Calendar.

**Recording of lectures:**

Recording any part of any lectures in any form must be first approved by the instructor in writing and is for individual private study only. See current Calendar, Tape recording of Lectures.

**Safewalk Programme:**

"You don't have to walk alone...." Call 220-5333 and a member of the Safewalk Team will walk you to your car, the LRT, or any destination on campus. Safewalk is available to all students, staff and faculty any time of the day or night. Look for the Campus Security Help Phones located throughout the University. Please don't hesitate to call!

**Gnosis:**

Gnosis is the Religious Studies Student Club. For membership or more information please email: [gnosis@ucalgary.ca](mailto:gnosis@ucalgary.ca) or visit <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~gnosis>.