

Course Description
RELI 3741B Classic Approach to Religion
With Professor Chris Jensen

What does it mean to study religion? Who studies religion and why? And what is this thing we're calling "religion" anyway? In this course, we will explore these (and related) questions, and – in the process – delve into the history of Religious Studies as an academic discipline, from its inception until the 1970s. Throughout the semester, we will explore the Euro-American theorists seen as founders of the discipline in their own words, trying to engage with them on their own terms, but also debating and critically assessing the strengths and weaknesses of their various positions.

In so doing, we will also acknowledge the ways that theorizing about religion (defined broadly) is a nigh unavoidable side-effect of intercultural interaction, and one that is always embedded in a web of social, political, and economic concerns. Thus, in addition to exploring the history of Religious Studies as an enterprise situated in the religious and colonial history of Europe and America, we will also consider examples of such intercultural interactions in the Chinese and Japanese contexts, as well as in the context of Indigenous/settler relations in Canada.