

**CARLETON UNIVERSITY**  
**College of the Humanities – Religion Program**

**THEORY AND METHOD SEMINAR**

RELI 4740 B – (Winter 2013)

Professor Johannes C. Wolfart

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**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

The seminar has as its mandate “[e]xamination of selected theoretical and methodological models used in the interpretation of religious data.”<sup>1</sup> Since the seminar is, with the exception of RELI 1730 “Interpretations of Religion,” the only such course offered undergraduates at Carleton it must survey a relatively broad selection of such models, both “classic” and recent. In keeping with developments in the academic study of religion in the last two decades (roughly), primary emphasis will be on theoretical questions, though these are frequently entwined with methodological issues. In keeping with the rich traditions of the academic seminar, the presentation of material by the instructor will be limited in favour of participation of all members of the seminar (on which, more below). Finally, wherever possible, the seminar will explore the contrasting positions and debates that are inevitably associated with any theory or method in the world of scholarship.

This course presupposes your acceptance of the principles of the modern research university, in particular: **1) that a seminar differs fundamentally from a lecture course; 2) that the academic study of religion is not the same thing as confessional theology.** Your understanding of these will undoubtedly develop further during this course.

**EVALUATION**

- 1) Essay – **40%** (15-20 pages; due 18 March, at the beginning of class; details described in an essay brief to be distributed)
- 2) Presentation to the seminar of one of the assigned readings – **20%** (each enrolled member of the seminar must present a reading in the mode of a conference panel presenter)
- 3) Response to a seminar presentation – **20%** (each enrolled member of the seminar must respond to a classmate’s presentation, adopting the mode of a conference panel respondent)
- 4) Ongoing seminar contribution – **20%** (up to 2% per class!)

Certainly, it is my aim as a teacher to get to know you as individuals, to recognize your individual strengths and weaknesses, and to foster individual intellectual development. At the same time, however, I am obliged to treat individuals equally in certain key respects. Therefore, as a marker I cannot take into consideration anything other than your actual performance on the items above.

**Late work will be assessed a penalty of 2 marks per day or partial day, without exception. Extensions will be granted by me and only for very good reason. Except in emergencies, no extension will be granted within a week of the due date.**

**POLICY ON ATTENDANCE**

Not only is it common practice to evaluate participation in discussion and contribution to a seminar, it is also customary that habitual non-attendance be considered unacceptable performance. Such non-attendance entails a failure to contribute that is simply un-collegial. Moreover, since it is impossible to make up a missed seminar, a member who does not attend regularly cannot really be said to have taken the course. **Therefore, any member who is absent from more than 3 meetings of the seminar will not receive course credit.** In other words, all members of the seminar must be present for three quarters of all meetings of the seminar.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www4.carleton.ca/calendars//ugrad/current/courses/RELI/4740.html>

## **READINGS**

All required readings are available to seminar members through MacOdrum Library, either electronically or via the reserve system. Please note that readings are a prerequisite for seminar participation. Your ability to contribute effectively will depend on you keeping up with the reading. Furthermore, all members of the seminar are encouraged to “read around” the seminar topics as much as possible, and to share their scholarship with the seminar. The preparation of an essay proposal and term essay will also undoubtedly involve such further reading.

## **OFFICE HOURS**

Office hours will be held Wednesdays from 1:00-2:00pm.

## **E-MAIL COMMUNICATION**

In order to ensure compliance with the federal privacy act commonly known as FIPPA (i.e. for your protection), Carleton communications policy states that faculty must conduct email communications with students only through their Carleton accounts. Please be advised, further, that students can normally expect up to a 24hour turn-around time on e-mail communication, especially during high volume times (i.e. before examinations, at essay time, etc.).

## **SEMINAR MEETING SCHEDULE AND TOPICS**

Week I (7 January) – **General Introduction and discussion:** Why worry about theory and method in the academic study of religion? **Assignment of Topics to members of the Seminar.**

### READINGS:

- Bruce Lincoln, “Theses on Method” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8 (1996), 225-227.
- Leigh E. Schmidt, “On sympathy, suspicion, and studying religion: historical reflections on a doubled inheritance” in: Robert A. Orsi, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 17-35.

## **UNIT 1: DEFINITIONS AND DEFINITIONAL DEBATES** (sunt denique fines)

Week II (14 January) – **The Definition of Religion**

### READINGS:

- Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious” in: Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago, 1998), 269-284.
- William E. Arnal, “Definition” in: W. Braun and R. McCutcheon, eds., *Guide to the Study of Religion* (London, 2000), 21-34.

Week III (21 January) – **The Limits of Religious Studies (and Theology)**

### READINGS:

- Donald Wiebe, “The Failure of Nerve in the Academic Study of Religion” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 13 (1984), 401-22.
- D.G. Hart, “Religious Studies, the Would-be Discipline” in: idem, *The University Gets Religion: Religious Studies in American Higher Education* (Baltimore, 1999), 223-233; 292-296.

Week IV (28 January)

- Margaret Miles, “Becoming Answerable for What We See” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68 (2000), 471-85.
- Ann Taves, “A Response to Martin and Wiebe” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80 (2012), 601-604.

## **UNIT 2: INTERPRETATIONS** (academic, allegedly)

### Week V (4 February) – **Myth and Religion**

#### READINGS:

- Bruce Lincoln, “The Politics of Myth” in: idem, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual and Classification* (Oxford, 1989), 27-37.
- Mary Douglas, “Children Consumed by Cannibals: Robertson Smith’s Attack on the Science of Mythology” in: L.R. Patton and W. Doniger, eds., *Myth and Method* (Charlottesville Virginia, 1996), 29-51.

### Week VI (11 February) – **Ritual and Religion**

#### READINGS:

- Ed Muir, “Introduction” in: idem, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1997), 1-11.
- Frits Staal, “Interpretations of Ritual” in: idem, *Rules Without Meaning: Rituals, Mantras and the Human Sciences* (New York, 1989), 115-140.

## **BREAK**

## **UNIT 3: EXPLANATIONS** (of phenomena, supposedly religious)

### Week VII (25 February) – **Psychological reason**

#### READINGS:

- James H. Leuba, “The Emotions in Religious Life” in: idem, *A Psychological Study of Religion: Its origin, function and future* (New York, 1969 [1912]), 126-150.
- Roderick Main, “Psychology of Religion: An Overview of its History and Current Status” *Religion Compass* 2 (2008), 708-733.

### Week VIII (4 March) – **Sociological reason**

#### READINGS:

- Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* [excerpt] in: M. Lambek, ed., *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* (Oxford, 2002), 34-49.
- Ann Taves, “Special things as building blocks of religions” in: Robert A. Orsi, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 58-83.

### Week IX (11 March) – **Evolution and Cognition**

#### READINGS:

- Harvey Whitehouse, “Modes of Religiosity: Towards a Cognitive Explanation of the Sociopolitical Dynamics of Religion” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 14 (2002), 293-315.
- Justin L. Barrett, “Cognitive Science of Religion: What is it and Why is it?” *Religion Compass* 1 (2007), 768-786.

## **UNIT 4: CRITICISMS** (From DWMs to WMDs)

### Week X (18 March) – **Gender and Religious Studies**

#### READINGS:

- Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience” *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991), 773-797.
- Daniel Boyarin, “Gender” in: Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago, 1998), 117-135.

Week XI (25 March) – **Postcolonialism and Religious Studies**

READINGS:

- Malcolm Ruel, “Christians as Believers” in: Michael Lambek, ed. *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* (Oxford, 2002), 99-113.
- David Chidester, “Real and Imagined: Imperial inventions of religion in colonial southern Africa” in: Tim Fitzgerald, ed., *Religion and the Secular: Historical and Colonial Formations* (London, 2007), 153-175.

Week XII (1 April) – **Theory and Method – A “Little Tradition” of Academic Politics?**

READINGS:

- Nancy Levene, “Courses and Canons in the Study of Religion (With Continual Reference to Jonathan Z. Smith)” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80 (2012), 998-1024.
- James Mooney, “XVI Parallels in Other Systems” in: idem, *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890* (Lincoln Nebraska, 1991 [1896]), 928-952.

Week XIII (8 April) – Concluding Discussion: Agenda and readings to be established by the seminar.

## REGULATIONS COMMON TO ALL HUMANITIES COURSES

### COPIES OF WRITTEN WORK SUBMITTED

Always retain for yourself a copy of all essays, term papers, written assignments or take-home tests submitted in your courses.

### PLAGIARISM

The University Senate defines plagiarism as “*presenting, whether intentional or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.*” This can include:

- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in “*substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.*”

Plagiarism is a serious offence which cannot be resolved directly with the course’s instructor. The Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of “F” for the course

### GRADING SYSTEM

Letter grades assigned in this course will have the following percentage equivalents:

A+ = 90-100 (12)	B = 73-76 (8)	C - = 60-62 (4)
A = 85-89 (11)	B- = 70-72 (7)	D+ = 57-59 (3)
A- = 80-84 (10)	C+ = 67-69 (6)	D = 53-56 (2)
B+ = 77-79 (9)	C = 63-66 (5)	D - = 50-52 (1)

F	Failure. Assigned 0.0 grade points
ABS	Absent from final examination, equivalent to F
DEF	Official deferral (see “Petitions to Defer”)
FND	Failure with no deferred exam allowed -- assigned only when the student has failed the course on the basis of inadequate term work as specified in the course outline.

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean.

### WITHDRAWAL WITHOUT ACADEMIC PENALTY

The last date to withdraw from **FALL TERM** courses is **DEC. 3, 2012**. The last day to withdraw from **FALL/WINTER (Full Term)** and **WINTER** term courses is **APRIL 10, 2013**.

### REQUESTS FOR ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term because of disability, pregnancy or religious obligations. Please review the course outline promptly and write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. You can visit the Equity Services website to view the policies and to obtain more detailed information on academic accommodation at: [carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/](http://carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/)

### Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or [pmc@carleton.ca](mailto:pmc@carleton.ca) for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your **Letter of Accommodation** at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (*if applicable*). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (*if applicable*).

### PETITIONS TO DEFER

If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a **FINAL** assignment by the due date because of circumstances beyond your control, you may apply a deferral of examination/assignment. If you are applying for a deferral due to illness you will be required to see a physician in order to confirm illness and obtain a medical certificate dated no later than one working day after the examination or assignment deadline. This supporting documentation must specify the date of onset of the illness, the degree of incapacitation, and the expected date of recovery.

If you are applying for a deferral for reasons other than personal illness, please [contact](#) the Registrar’s Office directly for information on other forms of documentation that we accept.

Deferrals of assignments must be supported by confirmation of the assignment due date, for example a copy of the course outline specifying the due date and any documented extensions from the course instructor.

Deferral applications for examination or assignments must be submitted within **5 working days** of the original final exam.

### ADDRESSES: (Area Code 613)

College of the Humanities 520-2809	300 Paterson
Greek and Roman Studies Office 520-2809	300 Paterson
Religion Office 520-2100	2A39 Paterson
Registrar's Office 520-3500	300 Tory
Student Academic Success Centre 520-7850	302 Tory
Paul Menton Centre 520-6608/TTY 520-3937	501 Uni-Centre
Writing Tutorial Service 520-2600 Ext. 1125	4 <sup>th</sup> Floor Library
Learning Support Service 520-2600 Ext 1125	4 <sup>th</sup> Floor Library