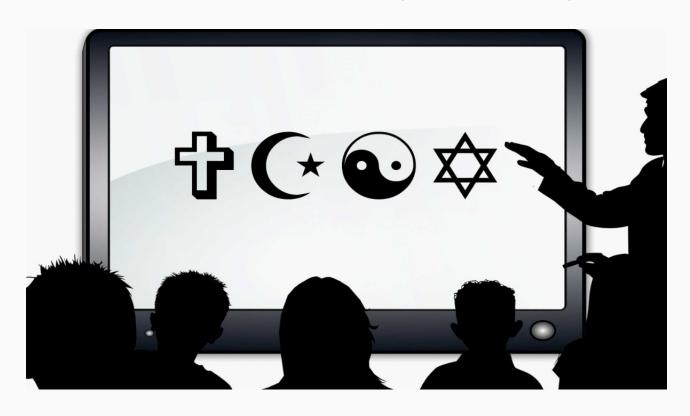
Lecture 4: Introduction to the Academic Study of Religion



PELS (Professional English Language Skills)

Run by the Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre

The Professional English Language Skills (PELS) Online Program consists of eight modules that are offered asynchronously online over eight weeks. Each module focuses on improving English language and academic skills.

To pass the course you need to successfully complete a minimum of 7 modules with a mark of 7.5 or greater for each PELS module

If you pass the course you can earn a 3% bonus on your final grade for RLG101



The Study of Religion &
World Religions



The History of Academic Religious Studies: General Patterns

- Relatively young discipline; founded in the 19th century
- Primarily arose in Western Universities
- Scholars' approaches and perspectives are shaped by this Western context
- In recent decades, Religious Studies has become more global and inclusiveThe Situation in Europe

Why the new interest in religion as an object of study in the 19th century?

- Challenges to the Judeo-Christian Paradigm through increasing diversity of knowledge and research
- Colonialism expanded scholars' access to diverse ways of living in other parts of the world outside of Europe
- New knowledge about various religious traditions became available to scholars

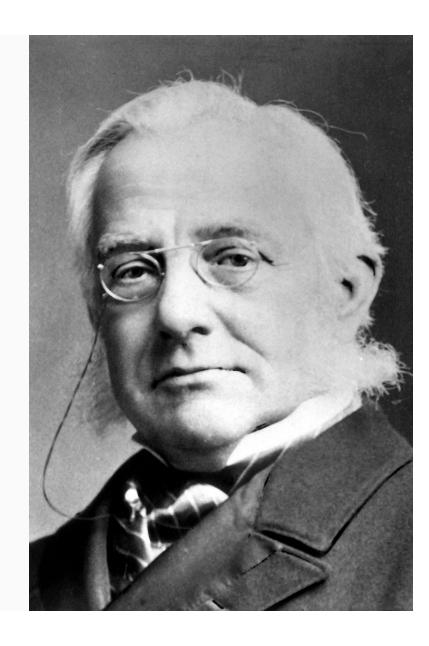
The Birth of The Discipline of Religious Studies

Towards end of the 19th century, beginning of 20th century, several chairs of Religious Studies were created.

Max Muller (1823-1900) a German-British Orientalist and Philologist credited with founding Religious Studies

Wrote Introduction to the Science of Religion (1873)

Founded Religionswissenschaft (The Science of Religion)



Religious Studies in this Period (late 1800s to 1945)

Led by a group of European scholars

Seen as a "scientific" endeavour

Scholarly trend: quest to find the origins of religion among humans from an evolutionary perspective

6 other areas of research: comparative mythology, sacred texts of Asian religiouns, the aboriginals of Australia, the traditional religions of Africa, the religions of the Americas, and the religions of classical antiquity.



E.B. Tylor Act. 67 Them a photograph by Moult and Fox

Thinking back to E.B. Tylor...

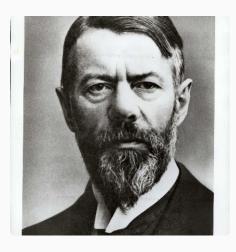
E.B. Tylor (1832-1917)

Anthropologist, looking for the origins of religion among humans

Suggests that religion started as a vague belief in spirits called animism.

This belief evolved into polytheism (belief in multiple gods) and finally monotheism (which means belief in one god).

Other notable scholars of this period (and their books)



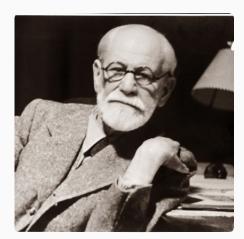
Max Weber

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1905)



Emile Durkheim

Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1912)



Sigmund Freud

Totem and Taboo (1913)

Religious Studies Post-1945

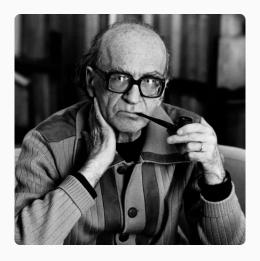
North American scholarship in this field develops rapidly

Inherits norms of the discipline from Europe

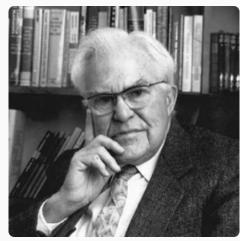
Increased diversification of data

Greatest concentration of scholars can be found in the US

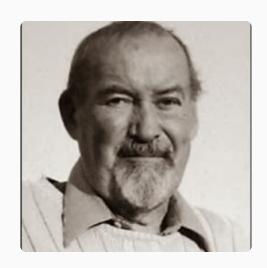
Notable Scholars of this Period



Mircea Eliade (1907-1986)



Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000)

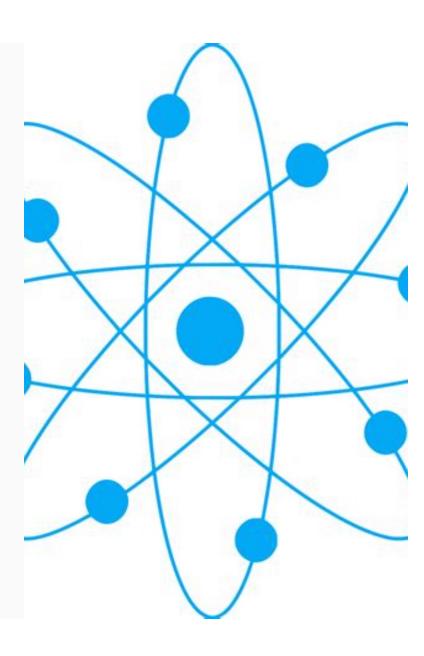


Ninian Smart (1927-2001)

"Science" of Religion?

Falls out of fashion mid 20th century for several reasons:

- 1. It's limitations
- 2. Cultural Relativism
- 3. Interdisciplinary Approaches
- 4. Postmodernism and Postcolonialism
- 5. Religious Pluralism



Religious Studies in the Late 20th Century/Early 21st Century

Critiques of older perspectives, theories

Growth of new areas of research, new questions

Increased diversification of perspectives/ideas

Notable Scholars of this Period



Catherine Bell

(1953-2008)

Ritual Theory



Talal Asad

(b. 1932)

Anthropology of Religion/Islam



Tomoko Masuzawa

Critique of "World Religions" Paradigm

Further Points About Contemporary Religious Studies

- -Practice of self-reflexivity
- -Suspension of disbelief and a sympathetic eye to others' beliefs/conceptualizations of the world
- -Development of Critical Theory/Critical Studies