
REL 100 – Fall 2012
Perspectives on Religion: Moods, Methods, and Moments in Christianity, Islam,
and Native American Religions
MW 3:45p.m – 5:25p.m.
Instructor: Alexis S. Wells



Course Description

Although religion is a ubiquitous feature of the sociopolitical and sociocultural landscape, attempts to define the phenomenon frequently yield an array of criteria and characterizations that promise moments of auspicious intersection and intense divergence. Religion is simultaneously recognizable and elusive, a site for dialogue and confrontation, a source of hope and instrument of destruction. As the product of the collective needs of a society and private needs of the individual, the definition of religion is shaped by the vantage point of the definer. Simply put, religion is a matter of perspective. Rather than seek to construct a universal definition of religion, in this course, we will sample perspectives in order to elucidate the moods, methods, and moments that have shaped and continue to shape understandings of religion in U.S. culture. Through an examination of Christianity, Native American Religions, and Islam, we will sketch the three (3) key dimensions of religion from the three (3) critical perspectives most integral to public discourse:

The Moods of the Practitioner: Understanding that no practitioner experiences religion in the same ways as another, in this section, we will attempt to experience the religion through an examination of the sacred texts, practices, and concerns of persons who identify with the central tenets of the religion and/or locate themselves within the tradition.

The Methods of the Scholar: Although the scholar may occupy the practitioner or neighbor positions, the scholar's voice is distinctive, due to his/her training within a discipline in the field of religion. We will use this section to observe the uses of some of the methods outlined in the main text and to assess the utility of different methods for the study of diverse phenomena within the field.

The Moments of Engagement with the Neighbor: We are all neighbors to traditions, philosophies, and/or orientations that are not our own. Therefore, in this section, we will examine the historical and continued role of religion in shaping our social, cultural, and political worlds, yet we will do so with a critical eye and increased knowledge about the traditions. Since we engage religion through multiple mediums, we will also use this section to critically assess the ways religion, as an ideological concept, and religions, as social/human phenomena, are presented in U.S. culture.

By exploring Christianity, Native American Religions, and Islam from multiple vantage points, we aim to not only ascertain the concerns, philosophies, commitments, and histories that shape the lenses of our interlocutors, but to recognize and sharpen our own lenses as well.

Contact Information and Office Hours

Office hours are by appointment only. In order to ensure a mutually helpful meeting, please schedule an appointment with me at least **48 hours** prior to the desired appointment time. At different moments during the semester, I will hold additional office hours. Please refer to Blackboard regularly for additional hours.

Alexis S. Wells
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A Word About Our Learning Community

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to central concepts in the study of religion, invite you to think critically about manifestations of religion in our sociopolitical and sociocultural world, and provide you with an introductory understanding of the philosophies, practices, conflicts, and diversity of three religious cultures. In order to accomplish the course objectives, the classroom must be a safe space for dialogue about important, and sometimes sensitive, topics. As we establish our learning community, it is imperative that we function with a communal ethic that promotes engagement from every participant and respects every tradition examined in the course. Although we will continue to add to the class covenant throughout the semester, it is helpful to keep the following 4 R's of classroom engagement in mind:

Respect: Respect the course by reading and coming to class prepared. Respect each religious culture by bracketing suspicion and suspending judgment. Respect your peers by listening to and engaging their ideas.

Reflect: Prior to coming to class, take time to reflect upon the central ideas and concerns of our interlocutors for the day. Take notes and construct questions to contribute to the learning community. During classroom discussion, reflect upon the statements and positions of your peers prior to responding. Strive to frame your comments and questions respectfully. Finally, reflect upon your individual learning needs at intervals throughout the semester. If at any point you feel that the learning space is not conducive to your needs, communicate with the instructor.

Repeat: When discussing sensitive topics, it is natural to respond viscerally to disagreeable statements in the readings or in class. The objective of scholarly spaces is not to banish disagreement, but rather, to create platforms for meaningful dialogue. When engaging an interlocutor, it is often helpful to first repeat his/her position to ensure that you have adequately grasped the components of the argument and allow you to identify the seat of your disagreement prior to responding.

Reply: Finally, speak! Your voice is an important contribution to the learning space.

* Course Requirements

- 1) Attendance and Participation - The classroom is an interactive learning space and it is vital that you engage in class discussions and activities. Your individual contributions are essential to the overall success of the course. Therefore, attendance and participation are integral to your final grade. You are allowed three (3) unexcused absences over the course of the semester. For every unexcused absence after the allotted three (3), you will receive a zero (0) participation grade for the day. Since you will not have an assignment for our discussion days, your presence constitutes the participation grade for those days. Therefore, **you should plan to be present for all discussion days**, unless there is an extenuating circumstance. A makeup assignment will be required if you are absent on a discussion day. Your final grade will include an assessment of your attentiveness in the course, demonstration of engagement with the readings, and participation in class discussions.
- 2) Critical Talking Points – The purpose of the critical talking points is to help you apprehend the central concepts of the readings and to facilitate discussion on the day of class. It is imperative that you complete all readings and assignments **on time** and that you come to class prepared for discussion. Preparedness includes having a digital and/or printed copy of the assigned reading in class on the day of discussion, as well as any additional assigned materials. For each class period, you will be required to prepare and post a bulleted list of three (3) “talking points” that demonstrate your critical engagement with the readings. The talking point may be a question or a sentence engaging an intriguing argument in the reading. Each “point” should be **no more than two (2) sentences** and should include the author’s last name and page number of the text referenced at the end, unless the author has already been cited in the text of the point. For instance, if you begin your statement with, “On page 57 of the chapter “Religion and Food Art,” Johnson states...,” then you are not required to include the citation at the end. On the other hand, if you do not include the citation-in-text, then your point might look like the following: “Despite her argument regarding the value of vegan diets to the overall spiritual health of all religious people, Johnson’s prescriptions constitute a universalizing imposition that contradicts her claim that religious people should ‘do no harm’” (Johnson, 57). Your list should reflect all of the readings assigned for the day, except on rare occasions when there are more than three (3) readings. Over the course of the semester, every student will begin the class discussion with one of his/her talking points. Remember, the talking points are designed to gauge your level of comprehension of the main points of the reading. In order to receive the maximum of three (3) points, your submission should demonstrate an engagement with the **significant** concepts in the day’s readings. See the above citation example for a model of a good point. You must turn in your critical talking points in order to receive participation credit on the days that you are absent, regardless of whether the absence is excused or unexcused. **The critical talking points are due by noon on the day of class.** You are not required to turn in talking points on the day of your pair presentation. I will not accept late assignments unless proper documentation of extenuating circumstances is provided.

- 3) Pair Presentations – The pair presentations allow you an opportunity to shape the conversation around one of the day’s readings. Over the course of the semester, you will be required to complete a 20-25 minute presentation on one (1) of the day’s readings with one of your peers. Although you are free to take creative license with the presentation format, the content of the presentation should include the following:
- a. Reading Summary: What are the author’s main points and what examples does he/she use to support the main points? Who is the audience for the reading? Who appears to be his/her interlocutors (Note: In most cases, you will use the endnotes and footnotes to answer this question)? What appears to be the author’s intent?
 - b. Context: Situate the reading in its historical context. What’s happening at the time of the text’s production that may influence the author’s perspective? What, if any, historical event is the author addressing in the text? This section will require some minimal research. Use resources in the “Additional Resources” section of Blackboard as a starting point for your investigation.
 - c. Connections to other Readings and Lectures: How does the reading connect with other readings for the day and/or those previously covered in the course? How does it connect with lectures from the course? Does the other’s perspective conflict with that of another author covered in the course?
 - d. Connections to Current Events: Do you see any parallels between the author’s argument and ideas currently preoccupying national and/or global conversations?
 - e. Questions/Discussion Points: Pose 2-3 questions and/or areas of discussion for the class.

As I said before, the presentation is an opportunity for you to contribute your unique perspective on the reading. Therefore, I invite you to think creatively about how you present the material (think Prezi, music, art, articles, etc.). Attempt to make the presentation as much of a multimedia experience as possible. Engage your peers!

- 4) Discussion Blog – The discussion blog is an opportunity for you to become accustomed to religious studies writing, using an unintimidating, versatile format. Although you are welcome to write as many blog entries as you’d like, you are required to produce **at least five (5)** entries over the course of the semester:
- a. Introductory Blog Essay: In 600 – 1,000 words (roughly 2-3 typed, double-spaced pages), describe how you “see” religion. Do you think that it can be defined? If so, how do you define it? Use examples from experience, television, art, music, and other sources to corroborate your definition.
 - b. Content Discussion Essays (1,000 – 1,200 words): The content discussion essays invite you to either (1.) expand upon your critical talking points and presentation or (2.) comment on current events through a critical engagement with the unit’s readings. The former option requires you to put our authors in conversation with one another and to compare and contrast their main points, while the latter option requires you to put our authors in conversation with popular, contemporary discourses. Regardless of which option you choose, be sure to cite specific examples from the readings and lectures to support your argument and to include

a clear thesis, or a statement of the intent of your essay, prior to launching into your analysis. You should also proofread your entries thoroughly prior to submission. Over the course of the semester, you should complete one (1) essay on each religious tradition, for a total of three (3) content discussion essays. The blog entries for each content area are **due on the discussion day**. Therefore, your first discussion essay covering Christianity is due on October 8th.

- c. **Capstone Essay (1,500 -1,800 words):** The capstone essay invites you to reflect upon your evolving definition of religion in light of the themes and traditions covered in the course. Using your critical talking points, construct an essay engaging the following questions: 1.) What are/have been the prominent themes in religion when examining the U.S. context? 2.) In what ways have your understandings of Christianity, Islam, and Native American Religions evolved over the course of the semester? Looking back at your introductory essay, how has your understanding of religion changed? 3.) Citing specific examples, what readings and/or insights about religion have been most central to your evaluation of religion in the U.S.? 4.) Finally, by what criteria do you define religion and why? The capstone essay is **due on the final exam day**.
- d. **Peer Comments (300-500 words):** In order to promote meaningful dialogue, it is necessary for members of the class to read each other's work. Over the course of the semester, you should critically engage at least two (2) of your peers' content discussion essays in 300-500 words. All of the comments should be **posted by the last day of class**.

* Student work submitted as a part of this course may be reviewed by Oxford College and Emory College faculty and staff for the purposes of improving instruction and enhancing Emory education.

Late Assignments: Late assignments will be accepted with the potential to receive full credit only in the event of extenuating circumstances. Late discussion blog submissions will be accepted with the penalty of a loss of a full letter grade (10 points) per day. Since the critical talking points are integral to your daily participation, no late CTP's will be accepted without proof of an extenuating circumstance.

Grading Policies

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Percentage:</u>
Attendance/Participation	5%
Critical "Talking Points"	15%
Pair Presentation	30%
Discussion Blog	50%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductory Essay (5%) • Content Discussion Essays (30%) • Capstone Essay (10%) • Peer Comments (5%) 	
Total Possible Points/Percentage	100%

Grading Rubric: The grades you receive on assignments/projects will be based on the following scale and your overall grade will be weighted based on the percentage allotted for each component of the course.

93-100	A	83-86	B	73-76	C	60-66	D
90-92	A-	80-82	B-	70-72	C-	0-59	F
87-89	B+	77-79	C+	67-69	D+		

Grade Changes: Unless in the event of an obvious error or oversight, grades on assignments are final. Grades will not be discussed before, during, or after class. If you would like to discuss a grade, please email me to schedule an appointment.

Important Student Information

Academic Integrity & Honor Code: Plagiarism or academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated. Any plagiarized work will receive 0 points. You are expected to conduct yourself with academic integrity and honesty at all times. Students who cannot meet this requirement will be subject to sanctions based on the Emory University honor code. Please see the complete version of the honor code for more information:

http://oxford.emory.edu/audiences/current_students/Academic/academic-success/student-honor-code/

Support & Disabilities: The Office of Disability Services provides a variety of important and useful services for students who need assistance. They can be contacted at: 404.727.9877. For more information on ODS, please visit their website: <http://www.ods.emory.edu>

Daily Assignments

8/29: Introductions

9/3 LABOR DAY HOLIDAY

9/5: Definitions and Methods in the Study of Religion

Reading 1: Livingston, “What is Religion?,” “Ways of Studying Religion,” and “The Sacred and the Holy” in *Anatomy of the Sacred*, pgs. 3-52.

Writing Assignment: Introductory Blog Entry (see above instructions).

9/10: Ways of Narrating “Moods”: Myths, Symbols, and Ethics

Reading 1: Livingston, “Sacred Symbol, Myth, and Doctrine,” and “Ethics: Foundations of Moral Action” in *Anatomy of the Sacred*, pgs. 53-73, 259-286.

*Reading Note: Skim the theories on pages 63-68.

9/12: Ways of Enacting “Moods”: Ritual and Organization

Reading 1: Livingston, excerpts from “Sacred Ritual” and “Society and the Sacred: The Social Formations and Transformations of Religion” in *Anatomy of the Sacred*, pgs. 74-95, 124-139.

9/17: Moods of the Christian Practitioner: Exploring the Bible

Reading 1: *The Harper Collins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, Introduction to Genesis and Genesis 1-3. Introduction to the Gospel of Luke and Luke Ch. 1-2, 15:1-10, 22-24, Pgs. 1-10, 1757-1767, 1794, 1805-1813.

Reading 2: Livingston, excerpts from “Sacred Scripture” and “Views of the Human Problem” in *Anatomy of the Sacred*, pgs. 96-113, 117-123, 211-223.

9/19: What is the Duty of the Christian?: Conflicting Moods amongst Practitioners

Reading 1: Jones, excerpt from *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States* (electronic edition), <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/jones/jones.html>, Pgs. 155-167.

Reading 2: Gray, excerpt from *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, pgs. 7-19.

Reading 3: Chavez, “The Mexican-American and the Church” in *The Columbia Documentary History of Religion in America Since 1945*, pgs. 186-189.

Watch: “Billy Graham 1957,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7i95RXDyY70>. (9:05 min.)

9/24: Methods of the Scholar of Christianity: Theology

Reading 1: Cone, “God in Black Theology” in *A Black Theology of Liberation*, pgs. 55-81.

Reading 2: Isasi-Diaz, “*Un Poquito de Justicia*—A Little Bit of Justice: A *Mujerista* Account of Justice” in *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, ed. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Fernando F. Segovia, pgs. 325-339.

Reading 3: Livingston, excerpt from “Soteriology: Ways and Goals of Liberation and Salvation” in *Anatomy of the Sacred*, pgs. 311-320, 324-329.

9/26: Methods of the Scholar of Christianity: Sociology of Religion

Reading 1: Weber, excerpt from “The Spirit of Capitalism” and “Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism” in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, http://openlibrary.org/books/OL17967952M/The_Protestant_ethic_and_the_spirit_of_capitalism, pgs. 47-55, 155-183.

10/1: Moments of Contact between Neighbors: Immigration, Christianity, and the Politics of Hyphenated Identity

Reading 1: Clarke, “The Arbors” in *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic*, pgs. 152-166.

Reading 2: Alba and Orsi, “Passages in Piety: Generational Transitions and the Social and Religious Incorporation of Italian Americans” in *Immigration and Religion in America: Comparative and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Richard Alba, Albert J. Raboteau, and Josh DeWind, pgs. 32-55

Reading 3: Chang, “‘Marked in Body, Mind, and Spirit:’ Home Missionaries and the Remaking of Race and Nation” in *Race, Nation, and Religion in the Americas*, ed. Henry Goldschmidt and Elizabeth McAlister, pgs. 133-156

10/3: Moments of Conflict between Neighbors: Christianity from the Civil War to Civil Rights

Reading 1: Mathews, excerpt from “‘Christianizing the South’—Sketching a Synthesis” in *New Directions in American Religious History*, ed. Harry S. Stout and D.G. Hart, pgs. 91-115.

Reading 2: King, “Letter from Birmingham City Jail” in *The Columbia Documentary History of Religion in America Since 1945*, pgs. 139-149.

Reading 3: White, “Letter to Jerry Falwell” in *American Religions: A Documentary History*, pgs. 599-602.

10/8: Discussion Day

10/10: Moods of the Native American Religious Practitioner: Exploring Native Sacred Stories

Reading 1: Parker, “The Cherokee Creation Story,” “First Fire,” and “Kana’ti and Selu: The Origin of Game and Corn” in *Seven Cherokee Myths: Creation, Fire, the Primordial Parents, the Nature of Evil, the Family, Universal Suffering, and Communal Obligation*, pgs. 33-36, 48-49, 58-65.

Reading 2: St. Pierre and Long Soldier, excerpt from “All That Is, Set in Motion” in *Walking in the Sacred Manner: Healers, Dreamers, and Pipe Carriers—Medicine Women of the Plains Indians*, pgs. 36-45.

Reading 3: Livingston, “Cosmogony: Origins of the Natural and Social Order” in *Anatomy of the Sacred*, pgs. 183-210.

10/15 – 10/16 MIDSEMESTER BREAK

10/17: Sacred Pipes and Sacred Dreams: Influences Upon the Moods of Native American Religious Practitioners

Reading 1: Niehardt and Black Elk, “Heyoka Ceremony,” and “At First Cure” in *Black Elk Speaks*, pgs. 87-94.

Reading 2: St. Pierre and Long Soldier, “Dreams and the Spirit World” and “Ritual” in *Walking in the Sacred Manner: Healers, Dreamers, and Pipe Carriers—Medicine Women of the Plains Indians*, pgs. 105-125, 156-167.

10/22: Methods in the Study of Native American Religions: History of Religions

Reading 1: Eliade, excerpt from “Introduction” and “The Sacredness of Nature and Cosmic Religion” in *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, pgs. 11-18, 116-128, 138-159.

Reading 2: Geertz, “A Reed Pierced the Sky: Hopi Indian Cosmography on Third Mesa, Arizona,” *Numen* 31, no. 2: 216-241.

*Reading Note: For Geertz, you will only read pgs. 216-236.

10/24: Methods in the Study of Native American Religions: Religious History

Reading 1: Martin, “Tradition and Crisis in the Eastern Woodlands” in *Native American Religion*, pgs. 39-65.

10/29: Moments of Reclamation and Reconciliation Between Neighbors: Religious Variety and Native Identity

Reading 1: Deloria, “Tribal Cultures and Contemporary American Religions” in *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*, pgs. 237-257.

Reading 2: Steinmetz, “Shamanic Images in Peyote Visions” in *Religion in Native North America*, pgs. 109-116.

Reading 3: McElwain, “‘The Rainbow Will Carry Me:’ The Language of Seneca Iroquois Christianity as Reflected in Hymns,” in *Religion in Native North America*, pgs. 83-103.

Listen: Ojibwe Hymns

10/31: The Neighbor Depicts the Native: The Politics of Appropriation in Native American Religions

Reading 1: Sun Bear, Wabun, and Weinstock, “The Vision Grows” and excerpt from “The Bear Tribe and Self Reliance” in *Sun Bear: The Path of Power*, pgs. 125-138, 169-176.

*Reading 2: Porterfield, “American Indian Spirituality as a Countercultural Movement” in *Religion in Native North America*, ed. Christopher Vecsey, pgs. 152-164.

11/5: Discussion Day

11/7: Moods of the Islamic Practitioner: Exploring the Qur’an

Reading 1: *The Meaning of the Holy Qur’an*, Trans. by ‘Abdullah Yusef ‘Ali, “Introduction,” “Introduction to Surah 1 –*Al-Fatihah*,” Surah 1 – *Al-Fatihah* (The Opening), “Introduction to Surah 4 – *Al Nisa* (The Women),” Surah 4:153-171, “Introduction to Surah 82–*Al Infitar*,” Surah 82 – *Al Infitar* (The Cleaving Asunder), pgs. 1-15, 182, 234-240, 1611-1614.

Reading 2: Livingston, “Theodicy: Encountering Evil,” in *Anatomy of the Sacred*, pgs. 235-258.

11/12: Moods of the Islamic Practitioner: Race and Religion in American Islam

Reading 1: Malcolm X, excerpt from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, in *The Columbia Documentary History of Religion in America Since 1945*, pgs. 159-170.

Reading 2: Bayoumi, “Rasha” in *How Does it Feel to Be A Problem?: Being Young and Arab in America*, pgs. 15-44.

Reading 3: al-Jamil, “Remembering Love” in *Living Islam Out Loud: American Muslim Women Speak*, pgs. 53-54.

11/14: Methods of the Scholar of Islam: Anthropology

Reading 1: Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, Occasional Papers (Washington D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown, 1986).

11/19 NO CLASS FOR AAR CONFERENCE

11/21 -11/23 THANKSGIVING BREAK

11/26: Methods of the Scholar of Islam: Women’s and LGBTQ Studies

Reading 1: Karim, “Across Ethnic Boundaries: Women’s Movement and Resistance in the Chicago Ummah” in *American Muslim Women: Negotiating Race, Class, and Gender Within the Ummah*, pgs. 89-124.

Reading 2: Al-Sayyad, “‘You’re What?’: Engaging Narratives from Diasporic Muslim Women on Identity and Gay Liberation” in *Islam and Homosexuality Vol. 2*, edited by Samar Habib, pgs. 373-394.

Reading 3: Fazili, “Fumbling Toward Ecstasy” in *Living Islam Out Loud: American Muslim Women Speak*, pgs. 75-85.

11/28: From African Slavery to 9/11: Moments Of Confrontation and Innovation in the Making of Muslim American Identities

Reading 1: GhaneaBassiri, excerpts from “Between Experience and Politics: American Muslims and the ‘New World Order,’ 1989-2008” in *A History of Islam in America*, pgs. 340-354, 365-377.

12/3: Moments of Creativity: Islam and Hip-Hop Culture

Reading 1: Khabeer, “*Rep that Islam*: The Rhyme and Reason of American Islamic Hip Hop,” *The Muslim World* 97, No. 1: 125-141.

Watch In Class: *New Muslim Cool* (2009).

12/5: Discussion Day

12/10 LAST DAY OF CLASS

12/13 9AM -12PM FINAL EXAM