

RLR700R
INTRODUCTION TO THE INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY
OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

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Wednesdays 9-12, Candler Library 119

This course addresses a series of questions in the study of religious practices:

- What is a practice? How do religious practices relate to the texts, artifacts, and other materials of religious life and thought?
- How are practices lived? How do communities of faith sustain, extend, and teach the practices of their traditions?
- By what means and methods do communities of faith think about, assess, and seek renewal or transformation of their practices? How do practices relate to the lived theology of communities of faith?
- How are practices most usefully studied? In particular, how does ethnographic method and experience illuminate the content and role of religious practices?
- How does practical theology, particularly in Christian traditions, proceed in critical reflection on practices in conversation with the heritage of practices and contemporary cultural contexts?
- By what methods can practices of varied religious traditions be brought into conversation?
- What are the implications of study and interpretation of religious practices for the formation of leadership in religious traditions?

Addressing these questions requires critical facility and nimbleness in a variety of disciplines and methods. The interdisciplinary study of religious practices and practical theology thrives at the intersection of multiple conversations: at the crossroads of ideas and institutions, theory and practice, construction and description, theology and ethnography, church and academy, ministry and other professions. Life in this intersection – the traffic of knowledge and insight rushing by in all directions, the buzz on the intersecting streets of discourse, and the opportunity to sit with different shop owners and find out what’s going on in their worlds – is what attracts me to the field.

At the same time, I find that the consistently bi-polar framing of the field makes conversation difficult. Everyone passes through the crossroads – often missing each other and failing to connect distinct forms of discourse and diverse interests. The need for deeper and richer coherence is acute, and constitutes the intellectual and practical challenge of this course. The syllabus moves from perspectives on the basic choice to study religious practices, to a survey of methodologies for exploring them, to the range of interests in what to do with what we learn about them.

REQUIREMENTS

- Weekly readings and discussions
- Discussion facilitator for two seminar sessions
- Observation exercise (DUE February 4)
- Research project (DUE May 4)

SCHEDULE

PERSPECTIVES

January 21

Introductions

IRB presentation, Donna Dent

SEE: http://www.irb.emory.edu/researchers/res_index.cfm

Film: “A Miyoshi Obon” by D.S. Mote

SEE: <http://gdr.emory.edu/practices/students/Donna.S.Mote>

Robert Orsi, “Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion”
from *Lived Religion in America* [e-reserves]

<https://ereserves.library.emory.edu/reserves2/index.php>

Kathleen Cahalan and James R. Nieman, “Mapping the Field of
Practical Theology,” *For Life Abundant*, pp. 62-85

January 28

Religion in practice [Discussion: Justin and Jeremy]

Courtney Bender, *Heaven’s Kitchen*

METHODS

February 4

Ethnography and qualitative research

Pierre Bourdieu, “Understanding” from *Weight of the World*;
“Fieldwork in Philosophy;” and “The Objective Limits of
Objectivism” from *Outline of a Theory of Practice* [e-reserves]

Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative
Research*, Introduction, Chapters 2, 3 [e-reserves]

DUE: Observation Exercise

- February 11 **Practices in history** [Discussion: Sarah and Jermaine]
 Presentation: Gary Laderman

Practicing Protestants, Introduction, Chapters 1, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12

 Laderman, “Locating the Dead” [e-reserves]
- February 18 **Performance and Ritual** [Discussion: HaeMin and Ashley]
 Presentation: Joyce Flueckiger

 Catherine Bell, “Performance” from *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago 1998) [e-reserves]

 Joyce Flueckiger, *In Amma’s Healing Room*

 DUE: Project topic statement
- February 25 **Space and Place** [Discussion: Sarah and Justin]
 Presentation: Bobbi Patterson

 Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, pp. 110-128, 164-68 [e-reserves]

 Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History” [e-reserves]

 Denis Cosgrove, “Geography is Everywhere” [e-reserves]

 Thomas Frank, “Historic Houses of Worship” [Blackboard]

 Bobbi Patterson, “Placing Lives, Practicing Place” [Blackboard]
- INTERESTS**
 March 4 **Practice, Formation, and Reflection**
 [Discussion: HaeMin and Jeremy]
 Presentation: Tom Long

 Cahalan, “Three Approaches to Practical Theology” [e-reserves]

 Poling and Miller, “Types of Practical Theology” [e-reserves]

 Fowler, “Practical Theology and the Shaping of Christian Lives”
 [e-reserves]

 Farley, “Interpreting Situations” [e-reserves]

Dykstra, “Reconceiving Practice” [e-reserves]

Smith, “White Man’s Burden” [e-reserves]

Long, “Whatever Happened to the Christian Funeral?”
[Blackboard]

March 18

Practicing Communities and Congregations

[Discussion: Jermaine and Jeremy]

Presentation: Teresa Fry Brown

Foster and Brelsford, *We Are the Church Together*, pp. 27-65 [e-reserves]

Nieman, “Attending Locally: Theologies in Congregations” [e-reserves]

Frank, *Soul of the Congregation*, pp. 57-100 [e-reserves]

Fry Brown, *Weary Throats and New Songs*, pp. 11-24, 237-41

March 25

Practices of Religious Life [Discussion: Ashley and Jermaine]

Presentation: Gregory Ellison

For Life Abundant, Chapters 2, 11

Frederick, *Between Sundays*, pp. 1-29, 63-127

Mahmood, “Rehearsed Spontaneity and the Conventionality of Ritual” [e-reserves]

Ellison, “Introduction” and “Late Stylin” [Blackboard]

April 1

Practice, Polity, and Politics [Discussion: Justin and HaeMin]

Presentation: Jennifer McBride

Chopp, “Practical Theology and Liberation” [e-reserves]

McCann, “Practical Theology and Social Action” [e-reserves]

Frank, “Polity” [e-reserves]

Bischoff and Moore, "Cultivating a Spirit for Justice and Peace"
[e-reserves]

McBride, Introduction, Chap. 6, Conclusion [Blackboard]

April 8

Teaching Practices [Discussion: Sarah and Ashley]
Presentation: Carol Hess

For Life Abundant, Chapters 4, 5, 7, 8

Hess, "Becoming Midwives to Justice: A Feminist Approach to
Practical Theology" [e-reserves]

April 15

Class presentations

April 22

Class presentations