

## **RLR 700H: Introduction to the Interdisciplinary Study of Religious Practices**

Mondays 12-3

Spring 2007

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This course is the one common required course for the Concentration in Religious Practices and Practical Theology. Its purpose is to provide an orientation to the Concentration through attention to different methods used in the study of religious practices.

Many of the readings in the course are ethnographies, done by scholars of anthropology, sociology, religious studies, and practical theology. But almost every ethnography is paired with short theoretical reading which will help us consider background assumptions and theoretical frameworks and to see how (or whether) these theories work “on the ground” in the study of actual practices. While the earlier weeks of the course focus on comparative methodologies in religious studies, towards the latter part we will be also be considering two other questions key to the Concentration: the definition(s) of practical theology and the relation of the study of religious practices to practical theology. We will read some key pieces seeking to define practical theology, along with an ethnographically-oriented theological work and work in congregational studies.

There are two other important dimensions of this course. First is the engagement of differences among participants, both in terms of method and in terms of overall orientation to the study of religion vs. the study of theology. The second is the ongoing discussion of the developing “mini-ethnographies” of one religious practice required from each student. Throughout the course we will keep trying to be attentive to how religions are lived and practiced and how best we can understand these practices

### **CLASSES**

#### ***January 22 Introduction: Beginning to Ask Questions***

Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System” (handout/ereserve)

Robert Wuthnow, *Rediscovering the Sacred*, Ch. 1 and 2 (handout)

#### ***January 29 Ritual and Symbolism 1***

Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*

Don Seeman, “Ritual and its Discontents” (ereserve)

#### ***February 5 Working Ethnographically***

Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description” (handout/ereserve)

Pierre Bourdieu, “Understanding” from Bourdieu, *The Weight of the World* (handout)

Diane L. Wolf, ed., *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*, 1996, Chapter 1 (handout)

Recommended: Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing*

*Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, 1995, Chapters 1 and 2.

**Ethnographic Exercise due**

**February 12 Practicing Religion**

Courtney Bender, *Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love, We Deliver*  
Pierre Bourdieu, "Fieldwork in Philosophy" (esp. pp. 3-25) (handout)

**February 19 Ritual and Symbolism 2**

Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Disciplines and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*

Don Seeman, "Otherwise Than Meaning: On the Generosity of Ritual" (ereserve)

Saba Mahmood, "Rehearsed Spontaneity and the Conventionality of Ritual: Disciplines of Salat" (ereserve)

**Project Topic due**

**February 26 Cultural History and Practices**

R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters*

Robert Orsi, "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion," in *Lived Religion in America*, ed. David D. Hall (handout)

**March 5 Phenomenology and Ritual**

Unni Wikan, *Managing Turbulent Hearts*

**March 12 SPRING BREAK**

**March 19 Practicing Theology 1**

Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*

**Project Update due**

**March 26 Practicing Theology 2**

Bonnie Miller McLemore, *In the Midst of Chaos: Caring for Children as a Spiritual Practice*

Susan Sered, *Women as Ritual Experts*

View <http://www.practicingourfaith.org>

**April 2 Congregational Practices**

Nancy Ammerman, "Religious Identities and Religious Institutions" in *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Michele Dillon (handout)

2 congregational profiles from *Congregations and Community* (handout)

James Nieman, "Attending Locally," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 6/2 (Fall 2002): 198-225 (handout)

Claire Wolfeich, chapter from *Lord Have Mercy* (handout)

Richard Valantasis, "Praying the Bodies: Parish Communication, Liturgy, and Community Spiritual Growth," *Sewanee Theological Review* 38/4 (1995): 313-328 (handout)

Interviews/Notes from Eiesland-Bounds Project/Intro to Atlas

**April 9 Practical Theology: Theories and Approaches**

Craig Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practice," in *Shifting Boundaries*, ed. Barbara Wheeler (handout)

Mary Elizabeth Moore, "Purposes of Practical Theology" (handout)

Don Browning, "Congregational Studies as Practical Theology," in *American Congregations*, ed. James Wind and James Lewis (handout)

Kathleen Cahalan and James Nieman, "Mapping the Field of Practical Theology" (handout)

Joseph Solovteitchik, TBA

