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Nature of Religion

General Reading:

W. Braun, R. T. McCutcheon (eds.): *Guide to the Study of Religion*, London 2000
P. Clarke/ P. Byrne: *Religion Defined and Explained*, Basingstoke 1993
John Hinnells (ed.): *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, London 2005
S. D. Kunin, *Religion: The Modern Theories*, Edinburgh 2003
Daniel Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion*, New York/Oxford 1996
E. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History*, London ²1986
J. Thrower, *Religion: The Classical Theories*, Edinburgh 1999

Week 1: Why is defining religion a hopeless business, and why do we still have to carry on with it?

J. Bowker (ed.): *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, Oxford ²2003. See in particular the introduction, pp.xv-xxiv.
W. Braun, R. T. McCutcheon (eds.): *Guide to the Study of Religion*, London 2000. See chaps. 1 and 2, pp. 3-34.
P. Clarke/P. Byrne, *Religion Defined and Explained*, Basingstoke 1993, esp. the Introduction
E. Sharpe, *Understanding Religion*, London 1983, esp. chs. 3 & 7
B. Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion. Immanent Anthropologists, Transcendent Natives, and Unbounded Categories*, Leiden et al. 1993
T. Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, chs. 1 & 2

Week 2: The early theories of religion. Write about either Tylor or Frazer!

- (a) What was their interest in studying religion?
- (b) Which categories did they use to describe it?
- (c) How helpful were those categories?
- (d) What are enduring merits and where are the limits of their works?

Read those items on the list that refer to your chosen author!

J.G. Frazer: *The Golden Bough*. (one-volume edition), chap. III and IV (also available online at Project Gutenberg)
NB: The Penguin edition of this has a useful introduction by George W Stocking putting Frazer in the context of modern anthropology.
E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, art and custom*, London 1871. Read the first chapters.
D.L. Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion*, ch. 1 (Tylor and Frazer)

E.J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion. A History*, Read the first four chs. (ch. 3 has a special section on Tyler, ch. 4 one on Frazer)

B. Morris, *Anthropological Studies of Religion. An Introductory Text*, pp. 91-106

B. Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion, and other essays*, London 1974. Read the chapter about magic and religion.

R. Ackerman, *The Myth and Ritual School. JG Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists*, Cambridge 2002, chs. 3 & 4 (esp.)

J.D. Moore, *Visions of Culture. An Introduction to Anthropological Theories and Theorists*, Oxford 2004, ch. 1 (on Tylor)

G.W. Stocking, *Race, Culture and Evolution*, Chicago 1968, chs. 4 & 5.

J. Thrower, *Religion: The Classical Theories*, Edinburgh 1999, ch. 6.

I. Strenski, *Thinking about religion: An Historical Introduction to Theories of Religion*, Oxford 2006

NB: You might find interesting (if not necessarily within the confines of this essay: B.R. Clack, *Wittgenstein, Frazer and Religion*, 1998)

Week 3: What are the strengths and weaknesses of Durkheim's account of religion?

- (a) What are the strengths and weaknesses of functionalist approaches to the sociology of religion?
- (b) Have the social functions that sociologists once ascribed to religion now been superseded?
- (c) What advances, if any, have been made in the sociology of religion since Durkheim?
- (d) What are the main functions of religion in modern society?

NB: Use this week's reading list selectively!

(1) General reading on sociology of religion:

Malcolm Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion*, London 1994

Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, Oxford 1982.

R. Robertson, *The Sociological Interpretation of Religion*, Oxford 1972.

(2) Specifically on Durkheim:

E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (various editions)

S. Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, London 1973.

W.S.F. Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion*, London 1984.

A. Giddens, *Durkheim*, Fontana 1978.

K. Thompson, *Emile Durkheim*, Oxford 1982.

Quite interesting is: H. Joas, *The Genesis of Values*, which has a ch. on Durkheim, but offers much more than that.

Week 4: To what extent can Freud's theory of religion explain its character?

(1) General reading on psychology of religion

A.R. Fuller, *Psychology and Religion. Eight points of view*, Lanham 1986
M. Argyle, *Psychology and Religion. An Introduction*, London 2000
D.M. Wulff, *Psychology and Religion. Classic and Contemporary Views*, New York/Chichester 1991 (this is a substantial work with long and detailed chapters on all major figures, movements and traditions).

(2) On Freud and his theory of religion

S. Freud, *The Origins of Religion*, in id., *Pelican Freud Library*, vol. 13 (read: *Totem and Taboo* and *Moses and Monotheism*). NB: any other edition containing these texts would obviously do as well.
M. Palmer, *Freud and Jung on Religion*, London 1997; part 1
A. Storr, *Freud & Jung. A Dual Introduction*, 1998
H. Küng, *Freud and the Problem of God*, New Haven 1990
J. Scharfenberg, *Sigmund Freud and his Critique of Religion*, Philadelphia 1988
Ch. Brock, *Freud and Religion*, Oxford 2000

Week 5: Discuss the conceptual gains of a cultural approach to religion!

(Focus on either Geertz or Girard.)

M. Nye, *Religion. The Basics*, London 2003 (introductory)
C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, chapters 4-7, London 1993, pp. 87-192 (this is the classic)
Geertz, Clifford: *Islam observed: religious development in Morocco and Indonesia*.
New Haven 1968 (interesting application of his theory)
S. D. Kunin, *Religion: The Modern Theories*, Edinburgh 2003, parts II & III
R. Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Book I, esp. ch. 1
M. Kirwan, *Discovering Girard*, London 2005
C. Flemming, *René Girard. Violence and Mimesis*, Cambridge 2004, esp. ch. 2

Week 6: Which methodological problems does the study of religion present? Can a religion be understood only by participants?

Hinnels (ed.), *Routledge Companion*, ch. 13

R.T. Mc Cutcheon (ed.), *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion. A Reader*, London 1999 (= 2005): the first part contains modern contributions, the 2nd part classical studies.

S.J. Sutcliffe (ed.), *Religion. Empirical Studies*, Aldershot 2004 (esp. relevant are the essays in part I)

A. Sharma, *Religious Studies and Comparative Methodology*, 2005; part I

J. Waardenburg, *Reflections on the Study of Religion*, 1978, part ii

Week 7: Religion today. Discuss EITHER the problem of 'secularisation' OR the debate about religion and politics!

(1) Reading on Secularisation

E. Barker (ed), *Secularization, Rationalism and Sectarianism*, Clarendon, 1993.

James Beckford, *Religion and advanced industrial society*, Unwin Hyman, 1989.

Steve Bruce (ed), *Religion and Modernization*, Clarendon, 1993.

A.D. Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain*, Longman, 1980.

Thomas Luckmann, *The invisible religion: the problem of religion in modern society*, Macmillan, 1967.

D. Martin, *General Theory of Secularization*, Blackwells, 1978.

Owen Chadwick, *The Secularisation of the European Mind in the 19th Century*.

Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society*, Watts, 1966.

Andrew Walker and Martyn Percy (eds.), *Restoring the Image*, Sheffield, 2001, esp. Pt 1.

(2) Reading on Religion and Politics

Hennels (ed.), *Routledge Companion*, ch. 24

Robert Bellah, *Beyond belief: essays on religion in a post-traditional world*, Harper and Row, 1970 (esp. the essay on 'civil religion')

J. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago 1994

T.G. Jelen (ed.), *Religion and Politics in Comparative Perspective. The One, the Few, and the Many*, Cambridge 2002

P. Norris/R. Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular. Religion and Politics Worldwide*, Cambridge 2004

K. Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, Oxford 2003

J. Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, Princeton 2004

S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations*, New York 1996

Week 8: Theology and the study of religion: Assess the relation between the two, their potential for conflict and for mutual enrichment!

Hennels, *Routledge Companion*, ch. 4

F. Schleiermacher, *Speeches on Religion*, ed. Crouter (read the 2nd speech and Crouter's introduction)

L. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 1844 (full text online at: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/feuerbach/works/essence>)

(Note: this is a long work, but it has a core argument which is repeated again and again and analysed from various angles. You get this idea from reading e.g. § 2. Then browse through the rest to see how it is applied throughout the argument.)

K. Barth, *Protestant Theology in the 19th Century*, ch. on Feuerbach (Barth sharply disagrees with Schleiermacher and argues that Feuerbach draws the appropriate consequences from an alignment of theology and 'religious studies')

K. Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, Oxford 1994

D. Ford et al (eds.), *Fields of Faith. Theology and Religious Studies for the 21st Century*, Cambridge 2005