Religious Studies 3860 (F07): Implicit Religion

Instructor: Dr. Jennifer Porter  
Classroom: C2033  
Slot: 20 (Tues/Thurs. 3:30-4:45pm)  
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Office Hours: Mon 9-12, Tues/Thurs 9-10:00  
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Course Description: This course begins with the question of whether it is possible to find religion in non-religious places. What does the term “religion” mean? Does religion always and only have to be found in a church/mosque/temple? Or can it be found in other so-called “secular” places? Is Hockey a religion? Are visits to Graceland or Star Trek conventions a modern form of pilgrimage? Are Raves an urban expression of religious transcendence and healing? This course will explore the concept of “implicit religion” using these and other examples. Key theorists of religious studies concepts will be introduced and their ideas explored and applied to the examples covered in class.

Texts: There is no assigned textbook for this class. Readings will be placed on reserve in the library.

Requirements:

Assignments (3 @ 15% each) 45%  
Take Home Final Exam 55%

Assignments: This class is going to follow a mixed lecture/discussion format. Although I will be giving lectures to cover the necessary introduction to the topics and theoretical ideas that we will be studying in the class, these lectures will be interactive: you are encouraged and expected to come prepared by having read the assigned readings, and to have comments and questions relevant to the topic ready to contribute in class. Please make sure you come prepared to class: it will make the class more enjoyable for everyone!

At the end of each section of our course, you will be asked to hand in an assignment worth 15% of your final grade (for a total of 45% of your grade
over the course of the semester.) These assignments will consist of two sections: first, a brief discussion of all of the assigned readings for this section of the course, identifying common themes and arguments, key issues under debate, key theoretical arguments, etc. Second, an analysis and critique of the arguments presented: do you find the argument that Star Trek fandom is religious feasible, for example? Is Hockey really a religion in Canada? Are Raves really a path to spiritual healing for Ravers? What is your interpretation of the definitions of religion, transcendence, healing, church, etc. used in this section of the course – are they adequate definitions, and does the topic example of Star Trek, Hockey, etc. fit those definitions well? Why or why not?

Take-home Exam: This course will have a final take-home exam. It is worth 55% of your final grade. This exam will be essay-style, with multiple questions, and with some choice of questions. There will be questions that focus on the various specific examples of implicit religion covered in class, and others that encourage analysis of themes present in several or all of the examples we have studied. The exam is designed to encourage you to show your understanding of the details and implications of the material we have been studying. You may draw upon outside sources to answer the questions on the exam; however, you are not required to do so. This exam is due on whatever date during the exam period that is assigned to us by the Registrar’s Office. It will be handed out on the last day of classes (or possibly earlier.)

Course Outline:

Introduction:

Sept. 6 –11 Introduction to the Course – key concepts, theories, issues.

**Section One: Religious dimensions of television and film fandom: *Star Trek and Star Wars***

September 13-18 Star Trek fandom as Religious.


Sept. 20-25 Star Trek Philosophy and Community


Watch: *Trekkies 2*

Sept. 27 Star Trek conventions as pilgrimage


Oct. 1-11 The Spirituality of Star Wars and Star Wars fandom


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**NOTE: MID-TERM BREAK OCT. 8-9.**
Oct. 16-18 – The Jedi Path


Watch: The Force Among Us

NOTE: ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE OCT. 18!!

Section Two: Religious dimensions of music and dance: Raves and Elvis.

Oct. 23-25. Raves as Religion


Gauthier, François “Orpheus and the Underground: Raves and Implicit Religion—From Interpretation to Critique” Implicit Religion 8(3) 2005, pp.?

Oct. 30-Nov. 1 Raves and Healing, Transformation, Ecstasy (the religious kind!)

Read: Scott R. Hutson 2000 “The Rave: Spiritual Healing in Modern Western Subcultures.” Anthropological Quarterly 73 no1(Ja) 35-49.

Watch: Better Living Through Circuitry

Nov. 6-8 Elvis the King


…con’t…
NOTE: ASSIGNMENT #2 DUE NOV. 8!!

Section Three: Religious dimensions of Sport: Hockey and Wrestling

Nov. 13-20 – Hockey as Religion


Watch: The Chiefs

Mar. 22-27 Wrestling as Religion


Watch: WWE matches – Hulk Hogan vs Andre the Giant; Hulk Hogan turns heel; redemption of Hulk Hogan

NOTE: ASSIGNMENT #3 DUE NOV. 27!!

Nov. 30 Conclusion – Is the concept of Implicit Religion integral to a full understanding of Religion in the modern world?