

**Introduction to Religious Studies
RELST 113**

Study Sheet #1

The following are terms you are expected to know for the mid-term exam, with definitions provided.

agnosticism – lack of surety in a belief in sacred powers

animism – belief in sacred powers in the form of spirits in the natural world

anthropomorphic – belief in sacred powers that take on human qualities (“Hand of God,” etc.)

apologetics – debates / arguments designed to prove one’s religion true

atheism – belief in sacred powers not expressed as a god or gods

“betwixt and between” – the period of ritual in which the focus of the ritual (the young person entering maturity) is neither one nor the other; no longer a child but not yet an adult.

“cluster” definition – a definition of religion based on evidence of various accumulated characteristics

communitas – the experience in ritual in which social barriers and hierarchies are removed to leave a sense of all being one

cosmological myth – myth about the order of the cosmos (“creation” myth)

dualism – belief in two equal sacred powers (Yin / Yang, etc.)

Enkidu – character from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*; a child of nature; buddy of Gilgamesh

eschatological myth – myth of an end time

etiological myth – a myth that explains something specific (how the Zebra got its stripes, etc.)

Gilgamesh – character from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*; King; part human part god; hero of epic journey

henotheism – belief in many sacred powers with an allegiance to one in particular

hierophanic myth – myth about human contact with a sacred power (God speaking to Moses, etc.)

“history of religions” – the comparative study of religion, across categories (myth, ritual, etc.); non-historical

“inner logic” – the tendency that some / all elements of a religion make sense to the “insider” even if they don’t make sense to the “outsider.”

“insider” perspective vs. “outsider” perspective – “insider” is a member of a religious group (why may have insight into inner workings / beliefs) while the “outsider” is not a member, but one who may be able to be more objective / critical of a religious community or its ideas

liminal – the sense of being “neither here nor there” in ritual; a sense of time stopping, or of space focusing, or reality stopping momentarily.

phenomenology – taking seriously the experience of religion without reducing it to outside causes

polytheism – belief in many sacred powers

reductionism – reducing complex systems (like religion) to one cause

semiotics – the study of symbols and multiple meanings

“substantive” definition vs. “functional” definition – “substantive” definitions are based on the content of a religion; “functional” definitions are based on how the religion operates (as it, what it does)

“teaching” religion vs. “teaching about” religion – “teaching” religion is teaching it as true; “teaching about” religion is describing its content: history / beliefs / practices.

trinitarianism – belief in three equal sacred powers (Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu, etc.)

typologies – systems / definitions based on types

unitarianism – the belief in one unified sacred power (Judaism and Islam; generally not Christianity)

Utnapishtim – character from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*; survivor of the flood; keeper of the knowledge of the path to immortality

The following are the books and articles on which the essay questions will be based:

Geertz, Clifford. “Religion as a Cultural System.”

Covington, Dennis. *Salvation on Sand Mountain.*

The Epic of Gilgamesh

Sexson, Lynda. *Ordinarily Sacred.*