

Introduction to Religious Studies
RELST 113

Study Sheet #2

→ The following are terms you were expected to know for the mid-term exam:

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 *ADDITIONAL* terms you are expected to know for the final exam:

ab origine – “from the origin”; moment of specific origin for each religious community

apocalypse – revelation / warning of a possible future destruction unless error is corrected

archetype – an ideal / idealized form or symbol of a common idea; the model for others to follow

axis mundi – the center of the world; the point of greatest significance for each religious community

boundaries / thresholds – markers of sacred space; the differentiation between the profane and the sacred

charisma – personal magnetism; a power of attraction that draws one (or many) toward another

“church” – term used to describe established religious communities (not just Christianity) whose future no longer depends on the continued existence and leadership of its founder

civil religion – the making sacred of a social grouping, through ritual, concepts of sacred space / time, etc.

cult – a small religious group whose founder is still alive and who attracts others through his / her personal charisma

diversity – the existence of difference among a set grouping

eschatology – study of “the end of the world”

exclusivism / inclusivism – the approach a religious community takes toward salvation; either excluding or

including others not in the group

hierophany – the interruption of the sacred into the profane world

homo religiosus – “religious man”; the idea that humans are inherently attuned to the sacred

“ideological” rituals – rituals designed to maintain power relationships (status, gender, age, experience, etc.) within a group

“in illo tempore” – “in that time”; a reference to the specific moment of origin for a religious community (for Jews, the exodus from Egypt; for Christians, the ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, etc.)

institutionalization – the forming of social institutions (clergy, education, etc.) to safeguard the future of a religious community

jihād – Muslim concept of “struggle” (between good and bad, or to overcome temptations)

lex talionis – “the law of retaliation”; rules that limit responses to wrongdoing

mysterium fascinans / mysterium tremendum – two sides of the experience of the sacred; the “fascinating” (attracting) and the “tremendous” (terrifying)

numinous – mystical form of sacred power

pluralism – the belief that social diversity is a positive societal quality

“revitalization” rituals – rituals designed to return things to “normal”: rain dances, etc.

routinization – the making routine the charisma (energy) of the founder / founders of a religious community

“sacred” / “profane” – the meaning-filled, totally different, marked off / the everyday, ordinary, useful but not meaning-filled

sacrifice – to give up or forfeit to the sacred power(s) for the betterment / salvation of self or others

“salvation” rituals – rituals designed to protect an individual / religious community from punishment or to provide ultimate reward (for Christians: baptism, communion, etc.)

scapegoat – item / individual selected to carry the burdens or errors of a person / people

sect – a small group / community that splits or breaks away from another to follow its own interpretations of a shared tradition

secularization – the process of balancing the personal with the social in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world

theocracy – human governmental form based on the law / laws of the sacred powers

theodicy – “God’s justice”; the idea that sacred powers will reward / punish those as they deserve

→ 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.*

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane*

The Epic of Gilgamesh

Sexson, Lynda. *Ordinarily Sacred.*