

Religious Studies

- Religionswissenschaft = the science of religion
- Science = definition, classification, analysis
- How do you define and classify RELIGION

QUESTIONS

- What is religion?
- How many religions have there been in the history of the world?
- Where does religion come from?
- How does religion work?
- What explains why some religions survive and others do not?
- Does religion actually even exist?

WHAT IS RELIGION?

- RELIGION IS EMOTIONAL DEVOTION (OR NOT) TO GOD OR MANY GODS OR NO GODS, ALONG WITH A COLLECTION OF PRACTICES THAT MIGHT (OR MIGHT NOT) BE DIRECTED AT GOD OR MANY GODS OR NO GODS AND THAT MIGHT (OR MIGHT NOT) HAVE A COLLECTION OF WRITINGS THAT MIGHT (OR MIGHT NOT) HAVE COME FROM GOD, MANY GODS, OR NO GODS.

Theories of Religion

- **Tyler and Frazer (social anthropologist):** social evolution: magic to religion to science: each does a better job at explaining the natural world.
- **Durkheim (sociologist):** “God is society, writ large”; Religion was the cement of society
- **Freud (psychologist):** religion exists because people are weak/sick; it is the result of psychological distress.
- **Marx (political philosopher):** Religion fools the poor and oppressed into accepting their submission.
- **Eliade (historian of religion):** Religion cannot be understood except from the inside. Religion is unique.

Definitions

[50+ definitions of religion (Leuba 1912)

[J.Z. Smith:

- The existence of at least fifty definitions of religion is **not** evidence that religion cannot be defined
- it is evidence that religion can be defined in at least fifty different ways

Religion's Primary Characteristics

- **Religion is an empty category**
 - *Something empty needs to be filled: by humans!*
 - *Content?*

Religion's Primary Characteristics

❖ Religion is a concept

→ *mental representation*

★ *hole vs. crater*

→ *concept as scholarly creation*

★ *fruit*

RELIGION'S PRIMARY CHARACTERISTICS

■ RELIGION CANNOT BE REIFIED

▶ RELIGION IS RESPONSIBLE FOR
CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

▶ RELIGION MAKES THE WORLD A
BETTER PLACE

RELIGION'S PRIMARY CHARACTERISTICS

• **Religion cannot be totalized or essentialized**

- *“the essence of religion is prayer”*
- *“religion is violent”*
- *“Christianity and other faiths are struggling with secularism.”*

Religion's Primary Characteristics

◆ **Religion is not majority-rule**

- *boundary and identity formation*
- *internal debates, not scholarly*

Religion's Primary Characteristics

* **There are no data for religion**

- getting dressed
- traveling
- speaking
- killing an animal

The Study of Religion

Religion is what we study, not how we study

Religion is studied as a human invention

The scholar of religion does not set out to offend, but she can inadvertently offend. Not her problem. So lighten the hell up!

methodological atheism

One Final Analogy

Religions, Religion, Religious Studies

=

Languages, Language, Linguistics

Finally a #@\$* definition

religion is a concept that refers to a system of beliefs, practices and narratives relative to superhuman beings (J.Z. Smith)
